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# FIRST IMPRESSIONS;

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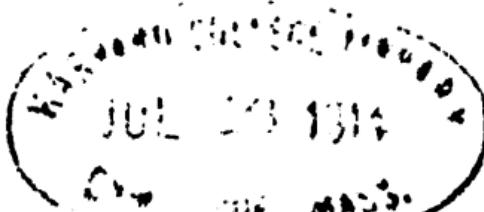
HINTS TO THOSE WHO WOULD  
MAKE HOME HAPPY.

*Sarah*  
BY MRS. ELLIS,

AUTHOR OF "WOMEN OF ENGLAND," "DAUGHTERS OF ENGLAND," ETC., ETC.

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Lindsay Swift,  
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# FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

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## CHAPTER I.



OW much the poetic character of all external objects depends upon the manner in which they are presented to our observation ! A wandering artist, or even a poet in search of the picturesque, would probably have paused at the nearest stile, and fixed his enraptured gaze upon the village church of Heatherstone, as a subject scarcely to be rivalled for a sketch, or a poem. The old trees which skirted the churchyard, the high gray tower, and the gravestones, new and old, were real objects in the scene ; and his imagination could easily supply the ivy for the ancient porch, the white marble or the green

turf for the venerated tombs, and the silent mourner stealing from the public gaze to shed her tears unseen.

Far different were the associations of Owen Meredith, curate of Heatherstone, as he looked toward that desecrated scene. To him the gray walls of the old church were bleak and bare, and the unclothed porch the reverse of poetical ; for there sat the beggars who were not in want, and there, too, the sturdy laborer would sometimes smoke his pipe on week-day evenings, while his children played about among the graves—graves so dry and dusty, and so worn with the trampling of reckless feet, that the curate hastened past them with a feeling of disgust, to think the dead should be thus dishonored.

Yet, notwithstanding all this, Owen was a poet, and would have been a painter too, had his fingers ever been practised in that magic art. Perhaps it was his misfortune that he was so, for many plain and common things, which the rest of the world was not only satisfied, but pleased with, failed to gratify his taste, and therefore failed to give him pleasure. Nor was this all : they too often inflicted upon him positive annoyance, from which he shrunk back into himself, like one who smarts under some real

and intended injury. Thus the sufferings of Owen Meredith were without end, and yet to have seen him in those rare moments when he was made happy, his buoyant step, the easy movements of his slight and agile figure, his animated but delicate complexion, and the flash of his bright blue eyes, set off by clustering curls of soft brown hair, one would have supposed him a personification of youth and life, with all its natural powers of thought and feeling in lively and healthy exercise. And so in fact he might have been, had not his mind been warped in early youth, either by some adverse circumstances which attended his first entrance upon life, or from association with other minds whose healthy tone was gone.

The worst perversion of all, was one which may as well be told in plain words ; and though no one would have denied the fact more indignantly than Owen himself, it was not less true that he would have liked to be a hero—yes, a hero of the Corsair character, the true “sallow sublime,” with pale brow, raven hair, and curling lip, to make the many quail before him. We grant that this particular style of hero is a little out of fashion now, but it must be remembered that twenty years at least have elapsed since Owen Meredith was curate of Heatherstone.

Having specified the kind of hero which Owen, in the secret of his bosom, wished to be, or rather regretted he could not be, it is scarcely necessary to describe what was his chagrin each time he contemplated his person in the glass, or compared his figure with that of other men, to see that he was not only fair, but absolutely rosy—not only slender, but absolutely below—yes, the twentieth part of an inch below the full stature of a man.

There are few words in our vocabularies either less understood, or less frequently applied to their right use, than humility, and vanity. Persons are called humble when they think too meanly of themselves, and vain when they think too highly. Would it not be more correct to say, that humility consists in not thinking of one's self at all, and that nothing proves so much the absence of vanity, as a right estimate of our merits as well as our defects ? That there is an intense and absorbing vanity perpetually occupied in thinking meanly of its possessor, it would not be difficult to prove ; and though the character we have already described had too much good sense and good feeling to go to this extreme, he was as much pained and mortified at not being what he wished to

be, as he would have been gratified and elated had the object of his ambition been attained.

With such an estimate of himself, or rather with a fixed opinion that he was the exact opposite of all he most admired in others, there was no wonder that he should shrink from society whenever it came within his reach, and the more attractive it was the more he shunned it, firmly believing that he was more diminutive and more insignificant than any one he met. It is true the village belles considered him a perfect model of beauty, but that only piqued his vanity the more, for few things are more irritating than to be admired for the thing we most despise in ourselves.

Lest our clergyman should be reflected upon for having nothing better to do than fill his head with these trifles, we will turn to other scenes in his life, for Owen was a character which deserves to occupy a nobler page of human history than that in which he has already figured.

Let us then follow him home after his public services in the sanctuary on a Sunday afternoon in summer. Home, did we say? It was a mere lodging in one of a row of small brick houses, separated from the public road by a strip of garden-ground, a paling, and a little gate, beside which grew a tall red hollyhock.

Within this little tenement, a passage with uncarpeted floor led to the apartment occupied by the curate, where it might be seen that not only the poet, but the scholar, spent his studious hours. An old bookcase, which had formerly stood open to display its china store, now enclosed large volumes of unintelligible character, upon which the mistress of the house was accustomed to look with reverence, and something like devotion. On the Sabbath evening, however, all except the Bible remained unopened; perhaps even that was studied less assiduously than on other occasions, for with the evening, of what to others was a day of rest, to the poor curate there was a sense of weariness and exhaustion both of mind and body, which made him long more than at any other time for the social and kindred fellowship of domestic life. At such times he used to take out his mother's picture, too sacred to be generally exposed, and, suspending it over his mantel-piece, would sit and gaze upon it, until the mute image seemed to glow again with life.

It was a delicately small picture of one of the loveliest and gentlest of her sex—the kind of picture which makes us feel that the voice alone is wanting. But then we know so well

what that voice would say, we have all its sweet tones so present with us, that it is better this should be left to our memory, than supplied, even if it could be so, by any stranger sound.

Owen forgot that night to take down his mother's picture, and lock it in his desk. His mind was more than usually occupied, though it would have been difficult to say how or why ; and once or twice he detected himself with a strange profanation, even while gazing on his mother's fair soft hair—he detected himself comparing it with some raven locks he had that day seen, and wondering which gave most expression to a lovely face. The fact was, a vision had that day presented itself to his view, which he could not easily forget. In directing his eyes for a moment to the Squire's pew, directly opposite him in the church, he had seen that a stranger made one of the party, and unless the transient glance he ventured to direct that way had greatly deceived him, the additional seat had been occupied by the figure of a young lady of uncommon beauty.

It was seldom that Owen looked at any particular member of his congregation, for he was not irreverent or regardless of his sacred office in the church ; and, besides, the all-absorbing and impressive earnestness with which he dis-

charged his duties there, scarcely one of the individuals who composed his audience possessed sufficient claims upon his interest to excite even a passing thought. Often—often did he wish the case were otherwise, that the people around him were more “humanized,” he was wont to call it. He forgot that the heavenly spark he sought to kindle in their hearts by his public ministry, was capable of imparting a superhuman energy and refinement even to their intellectual powers.

On the morning after the Sabbath, the dull morning, which to the solitary curate began another long and almost vacant week, he was surprised to see his mother’s picture still hanging where he had placed it on the previous night. He allowed it, however, to remain, and after his late breakfast had been taken away, he fell again into one of his long fits of musing, from which he was suddenly startled by the sound of horses’ feet close up to the garden-gate, and the smart slash of a riding-whip against the paling.

“It’s the Squire!” exclaimed Mrs. Barber, running breathless with haste into the curate’s apartment, “it’s Squire Allonby of the Grange.”

It was indeed the Squire, as he chose to let every body know; for before the good woman

had tied her capstrings, and exchanged her blue apron for a white one, he had fastened his horse to the gate, and was thundering at her door with the heavy end of his whip, at the same time indicating, by certain sounds of impatience, that he considered himself a man whose time was not to be trifled with.

"Well, my good woman," said he, his wrath relaxing as the door gave way, "is the parson at home, eh?"

In another moment, Squire Allonby of Heatherstone Grange was ushered into the curate's little parlor; Owen Meredith rising from his seat with respect proportioned to the importance of his guest.

"Good morning, sir," said the Squire; "why, bless me! you're rather low here; I always told Robinson when he built these houses, he was making them too low; another foot would just have done it; and this window, why, the frame is of old wood, perfectly worm-eaten, and yet the fellow has the face to ask as much rent for these houses as I get for mine in Duck Lane."

"It's a beautiful morning," said Owen, really wondering whether the man of importance had come for the express purpose of examining the interior of his apartment.

"Very fine morning," said the Squire, still looking this way and that, as if measuring the walls with his eye. "Very fine morning, sir, and therefore I rode over at once, to consult you about a matter of business we have been talking over at the Grange."

Owen was appalled at the idea of business to be discussed between himself and such a man; yet, glad of anything to fill up the time, he begged his guest to be seated, and assured him of his readiness to listen to whatever he might be pleased to propose.

The subject to be considered was of more importance to Owen than he had expected, for it was nothing less than a proposal that he should occasionally go over to the Grange, to initiate in the farther mysteries of Greek and Latin the Squire's three sons, already let loose from a country boarding-school, and having enjoyed, for at least six months, the free range of the stable and the barn.

Strange occupation for one of Owen's nerve, to call away these incipient sportsmen from the luxuries of hound and horn, and chain them down to dry studies, for which they had neither head nor heart. Yet the offer was a tempting one. The terms proposed were liberal in comparison with Owen's stipend in the church.

and among the many adverse circumstances, which he believed to be linked in with his destiny, it had not been the least to consider himself, as he had hitherto done—a man doomed to hopeless and irremediable poverty.

Mr. Allonby, who knew the straitness of Owen's income, pressed his proposal upon him with his accustomed want of delicacy ; yet evidently with the most friendly desire to render his situation more comfortable as regarded pecuniary matters. He even went so far as to speak of the curate's dining every day at the Grange, without concealing the fact that he considered a dinner every day might be of some importance to a man in his circumstances.

Nor was the contrast presented by the appearance of these two individuals less striking than that which existed between their different ways of thinking and feeling. The curate was gentle, delicate, and sensitive, to the extreme of fastidiousness ; while the country squire was robust and corpulent, with a countenance which denoted that natural obtuseness of perception in all matters of taste and fancy, which allowed him to roll easily along the high road of life, without annoyance from anything not absolutely opposed to his straight-forward progress, his authority, or his will.

While Owen was revolving in his mind the different bearings of this really important business, the Squire, who had no notion of waiting for any decision but his own, again applied his attention to the structure of the apartment, when suddenly discovering the miniature above the mantel-piece, he made Owen actually start at the manner in which he made up to it, and the remarks which might reasonably be expected to follow.

"Any relation of yours, Mr. Meredith?" was the unceremonious question he immediately asked.

"My mother, sir," was the reply.

"A good-looking woman, I dare say, in her day," continued the Squire. "A figure like that would most probably grow more lusty in middle life."

"My mother never was lusty, sir."

"Died then, eh, sir, died in early life? Well, it's what we must all come to, soon or late! Good morning, sir: you'll think of this matter, then; and, let me see, to-morrow morning I go to Rushton's cattle-show; Wednesday we have a few friends to dine; on Thursday, perhaps, you will call, and see the lads, and judge for yourself; and next week you may begin, provided you agree to my terms."

So saying, the Squire departed, shouting a loud good-by to Mrs. Barber, whom he supposed to be in her kitchen, and calling together his three dogs, which had all the time of his visit been alternately snorting and scratching at the door, and chasing Mrs. Barber's cat back to her hiding-place behind the rain-tub.

"And is this the life I am to lead?" said Owen, sinking back in his chair, so soon as all was still again; "to be at the beck and bidding of such a man as this? To be worried by his dogs, to say nothing of his ruder boys; to be despised by his servants, and perhaps insulted by his wife? No, no, I will not bear it; in this obscure dwelling my time at least is my own, and none can interfere with my personal occupations; but in his great hall I should be a dependant upon a vulgar family, exposed to the annoyance of being regarded by them all as such."

Notwithstanding the mental effort by which Owen rejected the proposal of the Squire each time it was presented to his mind, it continued to recur, not unaccompanied by calculations upon the different ages, names, and characters of those who composed the Allonby family. First, then, there was the master of the house, already introduced; then his pale thin wife, her

face twitched up with a thousand anxieties in which no other person took the slightest part, her figure gayly dressed, and her movements irregular and uncertain as those of the half-dozen little boys she was accustomed to push and pull up the aisle of the church along with her, her lips for ever pleading with one or another, until those two hopeless and fruitless expressions, "now do" and "now don't," might justly be denominated at Heatherstone Grange, "the mother tongue."

Next to Mrs. Allonby—nay, often before her, marched in the well-made and herculean figure of James Allonby, the oldest son, heir-apparent to the largest portion of the family estate, that part of it in which he resided at Branston Hall being entailed property. From a strange perverseness, which sometimes lurks about the human heart, the figure and bearing of this man used to be an offence to the young clergyman ; and even when he stood up in the pulpit, his eye used to glance to the Allonby's pew to see whether he was there, while his spirit was always more calm, and his nerves less agitated, to perceive that he was not. Why the presence of a person with whom he was so entirely unconnected should have produced such a sensation on the feelings of the curate, it would have

been difficult to explain, for James Allonby was universally considered extremely good-looking, while the bold dashing air with which he spoke and moved, denoted,—at least some people thought so,—a manliness of character and importance of position before which the helpless and the indigent behooved to quail.

Next to James Allonby, but some five years younger, was his sister Margaret, a girl on whom Owen Meredith seldom bestowed a thought; she was, in all respects except her size, so perfectly girlish, so healthy, so cheerful, and so independent. She had, it is true, a profusion of the most beautiful brown hair, but Owen had never noticed that it curled naturally. She had those dark gray eyes too, shaded by long black eyelashes, about which he had so often read and even written, but in her case he had never seen them; and though the whole expression of her face was open, clear, intelligent, and almost noble, it had been altogether lost upon him. Her brothers, too, the long lanky youths that stalked after her, their hands gloveless and tanned, and protruding far out of the narrow sleeves of their blue coats—all these, and they were many, had passed before the unconscious eye of Owen Meredith as even less worthy of his notice than their sister.

Far different had been the impression made by the fair form already alluded to. In those soft eyes, that pale complexion, dark hair, and graceful figure, Owen imagined himself to have beheld the very being with whom his secret spirit yearned to sympathize, and whom he had sought in vain among the vulgar associations with which he so often lamented that he was doomed to mingle. Yet how could this be ? he asked of himself again and again—how could a being thus delicately constituted associate with the family at the Grange ? how could she lean upon the arm of James Allonby ? No, he must be mistaken, but at all events he would see for himself ; and, far more intent upon discovering whether the real character of this lady corresponded with his bright ideal, than upon settling the condition of his future connexion with the Squire's family, he set out for the purpose of making his first call at the Grange.

The residence of Mr. Allonby corresponded in every respect with the impression his own appearance was calculated to excite—substantial, large, and without ornament, except such as the taste of olden times had bestowed upon it. It was a red brick mansion, occupying a large space of ground, calculated for the accommodation of a numerous family, and com-

manding a wide prospect over heath and down and fertile valley, where the flocks and herds of the wealthy owner were seen grazing in their deep pastures, while the cottages of his many laborers, with their thatched roofs and white gables, appeared here and there gleaming out from their fruitful orchards, or above the neatly-clipped garden-hedge by which they were surrounded.

Such was the rural prospect from Heatherstone Grange. The visiter of cultivated taste, and Owen was among these, regretted that more pains had not been taken to improve the aspect of the mansion ; that it was not, like other mansions of the same character and importance, adorned with pleasure-grounds ; and, above all, that the approach to it was one straight line of elm-trees, terminating in a broad space of bare gravel, extending to the front of the building. It required a further acquaintance with the state of affairs within, to know that there was a tide of mischief and disorder let loose with the outpouring of the Allonby family, that would soon have destroyed both garden and pleasure-grounds, had such been ever called into existence.

Far more in unison with the majority of tastes prevailing at the Grange, was the bark

and growl of innumerable dogs, which seemed to spring into life and action the moment a strange foot was heard upon the gravel at the door, and wo betide the timid mendicant who ventured past the corner of the house, to seek an entrance more befitting his own rank and calling.

The whole appearance of Heatherstone Grange, however, was not exactly in keeping with the aspect of the front. The house had been built at different times, and there were side-doors, and more irregular means of egress leading into walks along the side of holly hedges, where Margaret and her favorite brother had ventured upon the construction of something like bowers—at least they had gone so far as to have rustic seats placed here and there, and branches were in training to make canopies overhead; while in a little plot of ground, surrounded by a thick fence, they had tried the experiment of a few flowers, which the dogs had hitherto either scratched up or trampled down, so that scarcely one had been known to survive until the autumn. Nor were the dogs alone to blame; Margaret and her brother, like many other juvenile gardeners, had an impatient habit of taking up the plants they had put down, in order to examine their

roots, and see whether they had begun to grow ; so that, what with the ungenial nature of the soil, and all the accidents to which they were liable, the few annuals regularly sown, and the few shrubs as regularly planted, presented a somewhat melancholy spectacle of drought and death before the summer months were over.

Of all the family at the Grange, Margaret was the only one to feel either the scandal or the shame of having nothing worthy of the name of garden ; but she was yet too young to lay the matter much to heart, and those who heard her hearty laugh at the downfall of some rootless tree, or the mock majesty of some tall flower without a single leaf, would have doubted whether she did not in reality enjoy this scene of desolation as much as if it had been one of unbroken order, fertility, and bloom.

Her favorite brother—for in large families we often see that intimacy links together particular couples—was a youth of eighteen, as unlike herself as possible ; for instead of the steady cheerfulness which marked her countenance and conduct, he was subject to fits of boisterous mirth, alternating with a degree of moodiness, which wearied the patience and provoked the anger of all but his sister Margaret. It was thus that Margaret, as she was the

companion of his mirth, had become the confidant of his penitent moments, for poor Robert was not altogether the blustering, careless fellow he chose to make himself appear ; but, like many of his stamp of character, he would often have been glad to have compounded with his pride, could a return to order and good feeling have been effected without his dignity being compromised.

It was on Robert in particular that the wholesome tuition of the curate was expected to exercise a beneficial influence ; for hitherto the pleading of his mother, and the threatening of his father, even accompanied by the crack of his great riding-whip, had failed in producing the desired effect ; and nothing but a quiet hour spent with Margaret in the fields, or among the yew-tree walks, seemed ever to produce the least effect in bringing down his haughty spirit from the state of irritation to which it was sometimes excited, by causes the most insignificant and unworthy in themselves.

On the morning when Owen Meredith made his first call at Allonby Grange, Margaret and her fair cousin, Louisa Linton, were amusing themselves in the old parlor, or rather sitting-room of the hall, in a manner congenial to their different tastes. Margaret was enjoying a

hearty romp with her brother's terrier, while Louisa stood beside one of the old bay-windows, arranging some flowers in a china vase, and occasionally complaining, with a gentle sigh, of the inutility of arranging flowers where there was no one to admire them.

While both were occupied in this manner, the loud and always important step of the Squire was heard along the hall, and the door being suddenly thrown open, Owen Meredith was ushered into the presence of the ladies ; and while the young curate, perhaps the most gentlemanly visiter who had ever been presented at the Grange, advanced a few paces into the room, he was greeted in a manner by no means so startling to the inmates of the house as to himself. An old greyhound, past service in the field, immediately started up from the hearth-rug ; a surly cur, with tail erect, began to examine him from knee to foot ; and the dog with which Margaret was at play, restrained with difficulty by her arms around its neck, did all it could to heighten the confusion by barking with all its might. In vain the Squire advanced his foot to chastise one animal, his stick to intimidate another,—Owen betrayed the last thing he would have wished to betray, that he was either alarmed or annoyed ; a faint

shriek from Louisa indicated her sympathy with his situation ; while Margaret, finding the scene was likely to assume a more serious character than she had anticipated, ran away with the most boisterous of the animals out of the room.

" Ah, well sir," said the Squire, placing a chair for his guest, " you must not be afraid of dogs, if you mean to be a visiter here."

" Afraid !" said Owen, with a look of ineffable disdain ; " to be afraid is one thing, and to be stunned with their noise is another."

" Very true, sir, very true ; they are a little noisy, I confess. Louisa, where is your aunt ?"

And the worthy gentleman hustled out of the room, leaving the curate alone with the very being in the world he would least have wished to confront, under the charge of being afraid of anything in the whole created universe.

Owen, though extremely diffident, was incapable of being awkward, and he soon found a subject for easy conversation in the flowers which Miss Linton had been placing in the vase. They were many of them wild flowers, and his taste for botany led him to imagine that the same fascinating pursuit must have induced the fair gatherer to seek her nosegay in the fields. Louisa, however, disclaimed all such

object of pursuit ; and she did well—for flowers to her had no value beyond their beauty and their scent. But for the latter quality, the artificial wreaths displayed in a ball-room would have possessed quite as many attractions as those which Flora herself displays ; but with this fact Owen was not acquainted, nor was it one that he was predisposed to believe.

Among the many gifts which nature bestows upon the female sex, there is a nicety of taste and perception which serves them in many of the minor affairs of life, as well as qualifications of a higher character, and perhaps better. Louisa Linton possessed this gift. She saw in an instant what was pretty, and what was not, what was well arranged or otherwise, and thus she knew, by a sort of instinct, what ought to be worn, and what ought not. Owen, imposed upon, as many others have been, by the peculiar nature of this perception, attributed it to higher powers of mind and feeling,—and thus, while the conversation that morning was the extreme of common-place, he fancied he could discover in the remarks of his companion that delicacy and acuteness of perception for which he had hitherto sought in vain. And then to find all this in connexion with such a form and face !—was it that the dark clouds of

his destiny were about at last to be withdrawn or did this transient gleam of brightness only shine upon his path to show him the real depth of its surrounding gloom ?



## CHAPTER II



T was about a month after the full instalment of Owen Meredith as tutor to the young gentlemen at Heatherstone Grange, that the following conversation took place between the two cousins, as they sat in the old-fashioned window-seat of their sleeping room, where bright wreaths of clustering ivy intercepted the rays of the mid-day sun.

"I cannot think," said Margaret, "why you do not wish your engagement with my brother James to be known."

Miss Linton still looked down at the worsted-work she was pettishly taking in pieces, as, with heightened color and pouting lip, she replied—"The world has no business with my affairs, and perhaps it may never come to anything serious, even yet."

"Ah, Louisa!" said Margaret, looking earnestly in her face, "is it, then, as I have lately suspected, that you would be glad to be at liberty from this engagement? If so, do tell me, and I will assist you to the utmost of my power; only do tell me the truth."

"What absurd notions you have, Margaret; I assure you I never entertained such a thought, still less such a wish."

"Then why were you so angry with me for alluding to it before Mr. Meredith? My brother James is surely not a man to be ashamed of."

"I never was ashamed of him, and yet I must beg of you—nay, I must insist upon it, that you keep my secret for a short time longer."

"You are wrong, Louisa—I am sure you are wrong; you may call it delicacy, if you please, to act as you do, but to me it appears the reverse. When a woman is engaged, is she not as much bound to be true, in thought, word, and feeling, to the man of her choice, as after she is really his wife? and can she be so true when other men are ignorant of this tie, and consequently mix with her in society, as free to receive their most flattering and kind attentions?"

"And pray what have I been guilty of, Mar-

garet, that you should favor me with this lecture ?”

“ You have sat with Owen Meredith, gazing up at the moon, and listening while he repeated verses by your side. You have sighed over the very things which you knew would touch his feelings. You have gathered his favorite flowers, though they had neither scent nor beauty ; and—”

“ Nay, Margaret, you are too ridiculous ; you cannot mean to say that there is any harm in all this.”

“ I do mean to say there is harm in it, with your fine eyes, and his romantic feelings. Simple as any of these single acts may be, there is harm in the manner in which they are done —harm which the bare knowledge of your engagement would at any time prevent.”

“ You surely do not flatter me so far, Margaret, as to suspect that Owen Meredith may be the sufferer.”

“ It is no flattery, Louisa—it is the very opposite of flattery, in my mind, to suspect you of acting such a part as to betray a stranger into a hopeless attachment to yourself.”

“ And am I accountable for all the foolish fancies a stranger may entertain about me ?”

“ You are accountable, so far as concealing

from him your real circumstances may be the means of exciting hopes which you have not the most distant idea of ever realizing ; and if I mistake not, Owen Meredith has sorrow, and suffering, and trial enough, without being disappointed by you."

" Yes, and I like him all the better for that melancholy which hangs about him ; he would lose half his interest with me, if he was always cheerful and contented."

" Louisa, beware ; you have been my play fellow, you are my cousin, and my friend ; but I will not stand still, and see you act unjustly and cruelly even to this stranger. I will not describe all that I see and hear to my brother James, for that might make sorrow and mischief for your future life ; but if you do not take care, I will tell Owen that you are engaged, and I will do this as much for the sake of your honor, as for that of his peace."

Margaret Allonby uttered this sentence in that commanding tone which a sense of integrity opposed to unfair dealing is apt to inspire ; while her cousin, supported by no such feeling, bent down her head, in vain endeavoring to appear wholly occupied with the work she held in her hand.

It was impossible, however, to produce any

impression of lasting benefit upon the mind of Louisa, when opposed to the gratification of her vanity. Even her vanity had its contending claims ; for while, on the one hand, it suited the turn of her mind and character to be the wife of James Allonby, and the mistress of Branston Hall,—on the other, a deeper satisfaction was for the moment afforded by the influence it was but too evident she had obtained over the accomplished mind of the young curate.

Owen, on his part, must have been more blind than the rest of his sex had he not perceived the studious care by which this influence was maintained ; and, wholly ignorant of the fact of Miss Linton's engagement, as well as most unsuspecting of her truth, he allowed himself to dwell only on that dark view of the picture which he imagined his own circumstances presented. He was now fully installed in his office of tutor ; dined every day at the Grange, and spent the greatest part of every evening in wandering through the fields, and occasionally giving lectures on botany to Louisa and her cousin.

So far his occupations were exactly suited to his taste ; but when accident brought him in contact with the troop of wild Allonbys of the nobler sex, during their hours of unrestrained

liberty—when Robert taxed his skill to take aim at some passing bird, when one asked him to mount his father's hunter, and another clapped him on the back, accompanying the action by a hearty and vociferous commendation for having done some manly or daring act —then it was that Owen's color rose, that his pride rebelled against his circumstances, and that he determined to put up with poverty and loneliness for the remainder of his life, rather than endure the coarse familiarity of vulgar minds like these.

The fact was, Owen Meredith had never fired a gun in his whole life ; and what was still worse in the eyes of the Allonbys, he actually felt too much tenderness for the birds that flew past him to desire to kill them for mere sport. Robert alone, of all the lawless troop, used to look gravely in his face, while all the others were laughing ; and once or twice he went so far as to say, he did think it was a shame to kill animals that were not game, and such as there was no fun in killing. Farther than that, his sympathy with Owen's feelings did not extend ; but still he was the most tractable of his pupils during their hours of study, except when those moody fits were upon him,

of which all the family, except Margaret, so bitterly complained.

"I know I make everybody unhappy around me," said he one day to his sister, as they worked in their unprofitable garden—"and I wish I was dead, or gone to be a soldier, or somehow or other out of the way. And I shall go soon, Madgy, if my father ever does as he threatens. Yes!" he exclaimed, clinching both his hands, and raising himself to more than his natural height, "if my father ever lays his whip upon my shoulders, if he ever dares so much as to touch my coat with the lash, that day will be the last of my sleeping beneath his roof, and eating of his bread."

"But where would you go, Robert?" asked Margaret, with great simplicity.

"I know!" replied the young hero, with a mysterious shake of his head.

"Would you go to my grandmother's?" inquired Margaret again.

"My grandmother's!" exclaimed Robert; and his whole figure became inflated with contempt, as he repeated the word again and again.

Far other thoughts had Robert, and far other associations were beginning to give a tone and bias to his character, than those connected with the excellent old lady to whom his sister

owed so much of what was estimable in her habitual mode of thinking and acting.

At a very early age, Margaret Allonby had been sent to reside with this venerable relative, whose position in society enabled her to obtain for the Squire's only daughter a better education than Heatherstone would have been likely to afford. It is true that beneath her father's roof she was the subject of a kind of discipline which did more to strengthen her character than improve her manners ; but for all the gentler graces of her sex she was indebted to one whose happy influence extended long beyond the period of her own life. Margaret was thus far in advance of the rest of her family as regards right views of human conduct, though still but a child in manners and experience ; and it was perhaps one of her greatest advantages that her feelings had not been warped by a premature tendency to womanhood. The world to her was clothed in no romantic coloring ; her judgment had received no bias from her feelings ; and her strongest characteristic was her love of truth. Thus Margaret could speak directly and fearlessly on a question of right and wrong without setting the fear of man before her ; and, what is of still more importance, without any of those mental reservations,

mysteries, or secret influences, by which the fair page of woman's character is so often rendered obscure, unintelligible, and liable to constructions wholly unworthy of the position in society, and the influence she is capable of maintaining.

Margaret Allonby had none of these hindrances to prevent her clear perception of the fact, that while her cousin Louisa kept binding the engagement of long standing between her and her cousin James, she was not acting a true and honorable part, to carry on that system of interchange of feeling with another, which, although the world could find nothing in it to lay hold of as a serious charge against her, was in reality creating a false impression, and fostering feelings which could but end in disappointment and distress. All this was so painfully apparent to Margaret's clear and upright mind, that she one day went so far as to consult with her brother Robert upon the propriety of disclosing to Owen the circumstances of her cousin's engagement.

"Nonsense!" replied Robert, hastily. "What is Owen Meredith to you?—why can you not leave him to the consequences of his own imprudence?"

Was it the abruptness of her brother's man-

ner?—was it indignation?—or what could be the cause why Margaret's face was on this occasion suffused with a deeper blush than had ever burned upon her cheek before? She made no reply, however, but secretly determined from that moment that Owen should take the consequences of his own imprudence, rather than that she should be the means of rescuing him from impending trouble.

It was on the same evening, that Margaret Allonby took a walk alone to the village of Heatherstone, on some business of her cousin's; for, as she had been rather severe with her that day, she was anxious to make some atonement by executing for her some of those little commissions upon which, whether in town or country, Louisa was always ready to employ her friends. It occurred to Margaret, when in the village, that she might as well add to her other kind attentions, a call at the carrier's, in order to take home the impatiently-expected novel which Louisa, by this humble means, and this alone, was able to obtain. The carrier's cottage, or rather cabin, was certainly not the most inviting place for a young lady to visit; but Margaret, having been brought up in the parish of Heatherstone, as among her own people, had no fear of encountering any of the in-

habitants of that village, either late or early, at home or abroad.

The cottage of Jacob Hurst, situated at the outskirts of the village, was approached by a narrow lane, in which resided some of the least respectable families in Heatherstone ; but Margaret knew a little footpath through the churchyard and by the fields, which would conduct her to the carrier's door without having to pass any other. By this path, then, she directed her steps, and had just closed the little wicket which led out of the churchyard into a wide grass-field, intersected by many paths, when her eye was attracted by three young men hastening at a brisk pace toward the public road, and one of whom she could not doubt was her brother Robert. The other two she felt equally sure were the young Hursts ;—but what could her brother be doing in their society ? It is true he had often shared their rambling sports when quite a boy, for Squire Allonby had never been very select in the choice of companions for his children, and Robert had often ridden his favorite pony through the village, and even lent him out for experiments of horsemanship among the boys, while he joined in their games—feeling all the while a proud sense of mastery in being able to reclaim his pony at any moment he might

choose. In these juvenile amusements Robert had been accustomed to join ; but that he should now be willing to be seen in such society as the Hursts, who bore decidedly the worst character of any young men in the village, was a mystery which Margaret could not solve, and she quickened her pace with impatience, to ask old Dame Hurst, the grandmother of the youths, if her brother had been at the cottage, and what had been his business there.

Old Ailie Hurst was the only consistent and intelligible person about this family. Her son Jacob was a small, suspicious-looking man, accustomed to avoid all direct looks, and to evade all decided questions. He was civil to obsequiousness, never resenting insult, but wearing always the same demure aspect of imperturbable placidity. It could not be said of him that he was addicted to any of the vices which prevail most frequently in his class of society ; yet there was a cold, iron look about him, when appealed to on any subject of feeling, as well as on any point of moral good or evil, which rendered his society worse than repulsive to those who were in need of the oil and the wine of human sympathy.

As good and evil both tell with more effect in the character of woman than of man, the

mother of Jacob Hurst, in her aspect and general bearing, left little doubt upon the mind of the beholder as to what the tenor of her life and conduct had been. Whether from the deep lines of her strongly-marked countenance, her extreme age, or the flash of her dark eyes, which seemed at times almost to blaze forth from beneath her thick white hair—whether from her ancient and dilapidated dwelling, its crazy rafters, and the glimmering light of its small lattice—or whether from the doubtful and irregular habits of the other members of her family—certain it was that Ailie Hurst was looked upon by many of her neighbors as a person to be ashamed of in the daytime, and afraid of in the dark.

It was strange that Margaret Allonby felt nothing of this sensation as she entered that wretched dwelling at the close of day, when the last glimpse of twilight just struggled through the small lattice; while the blaze of a wood fire in a wide deep chimney showed the gaunt figure of the old woman, as she rose from her chair, and looked with inquiring wonder at her young guest.

“Has my brother Robert been here?” asked Margaret, wholly unacquainted with any mode of indirect inquiry.

"No," was the decided answer of Ailie.

"Are your sons at home?" said Margaret.

"No," replied the old woman again, "they are gone to meet their father;" and, looking at the clock, she observed that the cart was rather late.

"I think I saw them crossing the field toward the high road," said Margaret.

"May be so," was all the remark which this observation elicited.

Margaret then changed the subject,—and, amusing herself with the gambols of a kitten on the hearth, waited rather impatiently until the well-known sound of Jacob Hurst's cart was heard in the distance. She was not the only one who awaited his arrival; and, amid the general scramble, it was no easy matter to discover the richly-laden bag which travelled every week to the circulating library in the neighboring town—not certainly in the most appropriate companionship.

Margaret returned with her burden through the fields, still pondering upon the irreconcileable difference between what she had seen and what she had heard of her brother, and wondering whether old Ailie Hurst could really be so wicked as to tell, unblushing, a decided falsehood--when, on entering the churchyard, she

was startled by the figure of a man, seated on a rustic bench beneath the shadow of a yew-tree, which looked more venerable, and, she had often thought, as solemn as the church itself.

Owen Meredith started also, on perceiving it was Margaret alone at that late hour ; while, weary with her burden, she rested it for a moment on a tombstone, and turned to speak with her wonted kindness and freedom to the young curate, and to remonstrate with him upon the imprudence of sitting out in the damp evening air.

"It is of no consequence," said Owen, in a tone of more than wonted melancholy ; "it is of no consequence to any human being how soon I shall sleep beneath this turf, and perhaps the sooner the better."

"You have not had a letter, nor heard any bad news, have you ?" asked Margaret.

"Oh, no ; there can be no bad news to me, beyond what every day brings with it—the consciousness that I am still doomed to drag on my miserable life."

"You must not talk in this way, dear sir. It is unbecoming to your station in society, and unworthy of yourself. Had you not better come with me to the Grange ? Every one is glad to see you there "

"I have just been resolving—at least I think it would be better for me never to visit at the Grange again."

"Nay, do not dream of such a thing. I am sure we will all be kinder to you, if you wish it; and I will talk to my brothers, and persuade them to be more tractable, and more respectful. Come with me at least to-night, for I cannot leave you alone in this cold, melancholy place."

"Not to-night, Margaret; I have no spirits for the society at your father's house."

"Then come with me because I am later than I ought to be, and these books for Louisa are so heavy."

In an instant Owen roused himself. The bag of books was eagerly grasped, and he was soon walking by the side of Margaret toward the avenue which led up to her father's door.

Still, however, he seemed to be in a strange, uncertain mood; and, stopping suddenly after a deep silence, he said abruptly—"Margaret, I want a friend."

"I am but an ignorant girl," said Margaret with genuine humility. "I scarcely know how to be a friend to any one; but if I could in any way serve you, I am sure my respect for your office in the church—my feeling for you as a stranger and alone——"

"Say no more, Margaret. I will unburden my heart to you. Know, then, that I am the last of my father's family—a ruined family—all brought down to distress, and finally to death, by one gross and fatal vice."

"Your father?"

"Yes, my father and my brothers too. I have heard my mother say, they were noble and gifted youths, and one of them had a generous heart as ever beat within a human bosom. I cannot well remember them, for I was the child of after-years, and I think my mother doted upon me with a love proportioned to all she had lost, and wept over. My father's death I can remember well. He had fallen in returning home, and was found by some workmen in the fields. And then my mother took me with her to a small mean dwelling in the outskirts of a little town, where she took in work, and used to sit up half the night. Her heart was all the while in the church, of which my father had once been a minister, and all her industry, her daily care and nightly toil, were to supply me with the means of filling the station my father had once filled; with credit to himself, and benefit to others.

"It was on my tenth birthday, I remember it well—a clear bright day in July. Like other

children, I was longing for a birthday treat ; and early in the morning I saw my mother preparing a little basket with provisions, as if for a dinner in the country ; and my young heart bounded with delight. And many long miles did we walk that day, yet neither of us seemed weary ; for the air was fresh and clear, the birds sang over us, and our path was either through fields among the rustling corn, or along green winding lanes ;—and all the while my mother talked with me about the trees and flowers, the streams, the skies, and all things beautiful and bright around us ; but most of the good God who watches over us, and knew the secrets of our hearts.

“ At length we came to a quiet village ; I have never seen it since. It stood in a green valley, between two richly-wooded hills. The church had a tall spire, and it was among the graves around this venerable edifice that my mother had brought me to spend my birthday. We sat down upon a bank beneath an old elm-tree ; and after having refreshed ourselves with the provisions we had brought, my mother told me, for the first time, the sad history of my family : of my father and my brothers' shame, and of her sorrow. She told it gently—so gently, as none but a faithful wife and mother could

have told it ; yet for my sake she spared not the sin and all its sad consequences. This painful duty discharged, she then led me to a grave, and bade me read the inscription on the tablet at the head. It was my father's grave. We knelt beside it together, and, stooping down with our folded hands upon the marble, she required of me a vow that I would never, through the whole course of my life, in illness or in health, in sorrow or in joy, so much as taste of that polluted draught which had been the ruin of her husband and her sons.

“ Most feelingly—most gladly did my lips pronounce this vow ; and then I rose, and asked my mother to point out my brothers' graves, that I might offer it also upon them. My mother passed her hand across her eyes, while I stood waiting. ‘ Your brothers, my child,’ said she, ‘ are sleeping far away ; one in the deep sea, another beneath the glow of sunnier skies than these. Let us return.’

“ We did so ; and from that day I never entered my mother's door after a week's—nay, even a day's absence, but her first question, even before she pressed a kiss upon my cheek, was—whether I had kept my vow ? Even when my graver studies had commenced, and I was separated from her sometimes for years, her

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question was the same, before she folded me in her arms, or took me really to her heart. It is now nearly three years since I was called upon to part with my last earthly friend. My mother's health had been for some time declining; and, scarcely a month after she had seen me in deacon's orders, she breathed her last, with that vow upon her lips, as if she imagined me to be repeating it beside her.

"And now, Margaret, what I wish to ask you is, whether you think the member of such a family has any right to hold a place in respectable, in refined society?"

"I think," said Margaret, "that the child of such a mother, provided he keeps his vow inviolate, has no mean title to aspire to be one of the excellent of the earth."

"Perhaps I have not yet asked you all," said Owen, faltering; "will you tell me frankly, whether you think a delicate, and even a reasonable woman, would not, for the causes I have stated to you, reject me as her husband?"

"I think," said Margaret promptly, and with her accustomed candor, "that any delicate woman, provided she was reasonable, might be proud to be your wife."

"Thank you, Margaret; thank you a thousand times. I will now go in with you, and

spend the evening with your sweet cousin more happily than I have ever done before."

"Stay one moment," said Margaret ; "but no, what am I doing ! Another time I will talk with you ; not now." And she repeated to herself her brother Robert's contemptuous words —"What is Owen Meredith to you, that you should be meddling in his affairs!"

Still it was not in the nature of a mind like Margaret's to be happy under the conviction of having neglected so appropriate an opportunity of telling an important—nay, a necessary truth ; and her self-reproach was by no means lessened on beholding the altered bearing of the man she had thus injured.

Owen, on his part, was like a prisoner let loose from bondage. He met the cordial welcome of the Squire in an open, manly manner ; he condoled with Mrs. Allonby on the general derangement of her domestic economy, owing to the impossibility of her own personal superintendence ; he met the boisterous hilarity of the youths with something like their own uncouth humor ; but, above all, he approached Louisa with the air of one who could meet her almost on equal terms ; and, when her books were opened, and their titles and character discussed, he astonished even his warmest admir-

ers by the fluency and eloquence with which he could express himself, when literature in general was the subject of conversation.

“ Well done, parson !” was the exclamation of one of the Allonby youths, after a burst of such eloquence ; but even this expression of rude approbation, and the smart slap on the shoulder by which it was accompanied, Owen could now receive, not only with good-nature, but with a sort of easy grace ; so much was the whole aspect of the world softened and beautified to his once distempered vision. He was indeed, an altered man. The glance of his eye was bold and intelligent ; his voice deep-toned and clear ; and the whole expression of his countenance lighted up with that wild and spiritual beauty which belongs only to the highest order of human intellect and human feeling.

“ What have I done !” said Margaret, inwardly reproved, yet pleased to behold this fresh evidence of what she had always believed to belong to the character of Owen. “ I have wantonly allowed a spark to kindle into fire ; and it must now be my stern duty to extinguish it all.”

Saddened by the conviction that this cruel task must be discharged before her mind could be restored to peace, Margaret entered upon

the engagements of the following day, which proved to be one of unusual interest to the master of Heatherstone Grange.

For some years past, the game on this estate had been increasingly liable to the depredations of poachers ; and, although no man threatened more loudly than the Squire, and few valued the preservation of their game at a higher rate, all attempts at detection had hitherto been baffled in a manner which sometimes exasperated his temper against the whole surrounding neighborhood ; while it quickened the intellects of the young Allonbys, on this particular point, to a degree almost equal to that of a North American hunter.

Now, however, a crisis had arrived in the state of these important affairs. Suspicion had fixed itself upon the young Hursts ; and one of them had actually disappeared, under a conviction of deserving the doom impending over him. The other, perhaps more wisely, remained on the spot ; and, with something of the cold, impenetrable aspect of his father, repelled every endeavor to bring his delinquencies to light.

Like a chafed lion, smarting from the shot of an unseen enemy, Squire Allonby put himself into that kind of passion which he was rather proud of exhibiting, because he thought it gave

him dignity and importance in his family ; and, as he met none to oppose him, the tide of public feeling being universally against the Hursts, he went foaming about his house, altogether more uncomfortable than if any one had taken the offenders' part. Nor was it long before another outlet was afforded to his indignant feelings, by his son Robert's actually lifting up his voice and saying—"He was a fine fellow, after all" (the Hurst who had absconded), "and worth twenty of such men as his father and the other son."

In an instant, the ponderous riding-whip of Squire Allonby was raised, and this time the action was accompanied by no empty threat—it fell again and again upon the shoulders of his unresisting son, whose cheek turned ashy pale under the infliction.

This was, in short, the only means of discipline which Mr. Allonby had ever dreamed of in his family. It had had its effect, and was followed by its natural consequences. For the first time in their lives, the young Allonbys had acknowledged a milder government, in that of their tutor ; and perhaps the very reason why they did acknowledge it, was because of its lenity, as well as its justice. Besides which, there was an intellectual superiority in the mind

and conversation of Owen, to which, during the hours of tuition, they yielded a willing submission. At the hospitable table, in the old dining-room of Heatherstone Grange,—in the stable, among the sportsmen who often congregated there, Owen was indeed an insignificant being, open to contempt by every act, and liable to betray his ignorance whenever he opened his lips ; but, in the school-room, it was curious to behold the mastery he exercised over those herculean youths, delicate and slightly moulded as he was. Perhaps none of them felt this so much as Robert, simply because they were less capable of appreciating intellectual superiority ; and when the wayward boy was in his happiest moods, he would often prefer the society of his tutor to that of the most skilful grooms in his father's stable.

It was about a week after the occasion of Robert's receiving his father's chastisement, that he lingered longer than usual with Margaret in the yew-tree shade, where their steril garden displayed its rose-bush, now stripped of leaves, and its Michaelmas daisy blooming in spite of autumnal winds. The brother and the sister had both been unusually silent, for there was a dreariness in the scene altogether which seemed to have touched even their young

minds with sadness ; and Margaret, partly from the want of something else to say, at last reminded her brother that his school-hours had commenced.

"I don't care much about that to-day," replied Robert, carelessly. "I want to talk to you, Madgy, about my mother."

Margaret looked up in amazement : Mrs. Al-lonby was a person never talked about by any one, especially in her own family ; and Robert spoke in a tone so different from his usual manner, she was wholly at a loss what to make of it.

"Yes, Margaret," he continued, "I want to talk to you about my mother. It has struck me during the last week, more than it ever did before, that we are all very careless about her health and happiness ; that she has all the trouble of the family,—and that we make her but little return."

"You are right, dear Robert," said Margaret ; "I have often thought of the same thing myself ; and I have tried lately to help her a good deal, but I assure you it is very difficult."

"Never mind that, Madgy. You must try more and more ; for old age will come, and if you do not think of her declining health, who will ?"

"Old age, Robert! what makes you think of old age to-day? Surely that is far enough off."

"Well, Madgy, never mind that either;—never mind what makes me talk of old age to-day. Bear with me a little longer; I shall not trouble you in this way to-morrow."

"What can you mean, Robert? I am sure some strange thing has come over you; you have been so different ever since my father—"

"Don't mention that, Margaret; I warn you, neither in jest nor in earnest to mention that. I want to be quiet, and to keep my temper now."

As Robert said this, he drew his sister's arm over his shoulder, and, placing his own around her waist, they walked together in silence down the yew-tree walk, until he suddenly recollect-  
ed the lateness of the hour—when, pressing a hasty kiss upon her cheek, he sprang across one of the garden beds, and joined his brothers in the school-room. It is scarcely necessary to say that he was unusually absent that morning; though, at the same time, his behavior to his tutor was more respectful and considerate than it had ever been before. Owen himself, however, was too deeply absorbed in his own secret meditations to be any very critical ob-  
server of the conduct of his pupils; and the

peculiar state of Robert's mind would have been wholly unnoticed but for a very slight circumstance which occurred in the afternoon of the same day.

Louisa Linton happening to be more than usually occupied, and a mysterious kind of general movement in the house rendering Owen's situation there rather an intrusion than otherwise, he retired to the school-room, for the purpose of indulging uninterruptedly the train of his own pleasant thoughts—not doubting but that the evening would bring its accustomed walk, and thus reward him for his patient endurance of less congenial moments.

Like all self-constituted heroes of romance, Owen was in a state of high poetical excitement. Choice couplets, and stanzas, and apostrophes to the nameless one, floating through his brain, mingled with images the most attractive and brilliant which the imagination of poet or of painter ever conjured up. Pens, ink, and paper lay before him : it was a relief to write down the overflowings of his fancy ; until, weary and disgusted with the insufficiency of words to express what was laboring in his heart, he tore the paper he had scribbled over, and then stooped down and gathered up the fragments from the floor, lest thoughts too

sacred should be exposed to vulgar observation.

Intent upon destroying every vestige of this work of his own hands, he was scarcely conscious of having taken up a scrap of soiled and crumpled paper along with his own, until it had been torn in many pieces—when his eye was suddenly struck with rather an extraordinary kind of penmanship, and the words, “At six on the evening of Friday the fifteenth.” The curiosity of an idler is easily excited: that very day was the fifteenth. Owen sought for the other fragments, and was so long in finding them, that the evening closed in before he was able to put the whole together, so as to discover any meaning to the words. It was a mean and barbarous hand, and would scarcely have awakened interest enough to excite a second thought, but that every fresh word added to the fragment conveyed a sort of half-hidden import, which could not fail to awaken suspicion, even in a mind preoccupied like Owen’s. After repeated examination, however, no address could be found, and Owen determined to regard the whole as emanating from the stable or the kitchen, and consequently altogether unimportant to him.

Satisfied with this conclusion, he was saun-

tering along one of the walks in the yew-tree garden, when the figure of Margaret Allonby suddenly crossed his path.

"I have come out in search of you," said Margaret, "for I thought it was only right to tell you what all this bustle in the house is about."

"We are well met, then," said Owen, anxious to avoid any detail of household disturbances. "We are well met; for I want you to decipher the mysterious characters on this paper, or rather to interpret them when they are deciphered, for that is the great difficulty with me."

Owen then arranged the fragments of paper as well as he could, and placed them in Margaret's hand. Her quick eye glanced over the words. She understood them but too well; and laying upon Owen a solemn charge not to disclose to any human being what had transpired, but to go into the house, and when the family had gathered round the tea-table, if any one asked for her, to say that he had met her on her way to the village—she wrapped her shawl more closely around her, and flew with almost supernatural speed down the field which communicated with her father's garden.

The village of Heatherstone was situated in

a narrow valley between two distinct ranges of high ground, which terminated at the distance of half a mile in a lofty and rugged cliff, at the base of which rolled the ocean. Still the character of the simple inhabitants of the village was almost exclusively pastoral, though a few scattered huts between it and the sea were evidently the habitations of those whose occupation was connected with the great deep. The bias of public opinion was not very favorable to this portion of the community ; and if the fireside gossip of the village of Heatherstone had been worthy of belief, strange tales might have been told of shipwrecks on that fearful coast—of scenes in which the perished or even the perishing had not had fair play at the hands of their brethren on the coast ; but chiefly of smuggling exploits, with all the successful and unsuccessful stratagems by which the iron hand of executive justice had been evaded.

Altogether, that part of the country which lay between the village and the sea had acquired a character by no means attractive to the timid and the unprotected ; and scarcely in the broad noon of summer would a delicate female have trusted herself alone upon that beach. Yet to this very spot it was that Margaret Al-

lonby with breathless speed was hastening, regardless of the gathering gloom of advancing night, of the dreary heights she had yet to cross, of the perilous descent to the shore, and of the dark hollows and deep caves which broke the majestic outline of the cliffs. On all, or any one of these, Margaret never once bestowed a thought. Her mind was set upon reaching a particular spot before the hour of six ; and though she had often, in girlish pastime, traversed those wild paths in company with her brothers, she knew too well the nature of that precipitous descent not to be aware that a single moment lost by the way might wholly defeat the object of her enterprise. The wide ocean was now before her, blue and cold, and unfathomable,—revealing none of its dark secrets to her eager gaze. There seemed to be a speck upon its bosom. She held her breath for a moment. It was a nearer object —there were two—two figures on the path before her. Could one of them be her brother ? She hastened on. They were two fishermen. Amazed to see her there, they would have stopped and learned her strange errand ; but she passed them so rapidly, that they were too much bewildered to speak.

Arrived at last on the very edge of the cliff,

Margaret looked down. At a fearful depth below her was a boat upon the beach. One man alone remained with it, and he stretched his head as if watching impatiently for some one in the distance. Now was the difficulty of the path to be tried. Margaret began to descend ; it required all her natural agility and strength to make sure her footing, and often was her own safety endangered by the hurried glance she cast to the distance to see if other forms had yet appeared. Half way down, she ventured to take time to breathe again. But no—“ They are coming—they are coming, and he is with them !” Again she hastened on—there was a splash of the oars, a suppressed greeting, and Robert Allonby had already set his foot upon the edge of the boat, which had been pushed off among the breakers,—when a loud shriek from the cliff made all the party look, and look again ; for the increasing darkness, and the blackness of the damp rocks, rendered it difficult to perceive any object distinctly at that distance.

“ That was my sister Margaret’s voice,” said Robert, “ if I know one sound from another.”

“ And what if it was ?” said one of the boatmen sullenly. “ Those who embark with us must not be kept back by the scream of a silly girl.”

"I'll tell you what," said Robert, piqued by this assumption of authority, "Margaret Allonby was never yet called a silly girl by those who knew her; and I won't stir an inch until I have seen her safely at the bottom of that cliff."

"And her father and his pack of hounds along with him," said another of the men.

In another moment Margaret would have been too late. But now, at the very point of time when the proud youth had been, as he considered it, insulted by his comrades, his sister was by his side, her arms around his neck, her tears upon his cheek, and her kind voice whispering such entreaties in his ear as none but a heart of adamant could have resisted.

At the same time young Hurst, who was one of the party in the boat, used every species of that rude eloquence of which he was master, and which consisted chiefly of vulgar sarcasm, to lure his victim once more into his toils.

Indignant at this interference from such a quarter, and at the unfair advantage thus taken of her brother's youth and wayward temper, Margaret turned a fearless look of defiance toward men from whom almost any other woman would have shrunk appalled, especially in such a place.

"Off! off!" said she, "with your vile boat, or you will repent of your delay."

"Repent of it, shall we?" said young Hurst; and the party joined in a chorus of laughter.

Gladly would Margaret now have retreated, for her courage was at last beginning to give way; but seeing that her brother still hesitated whether to accompany her or them, she roused herself again, in the hope of inducing them to push off without him. She had, besides, her watch and some money in reserve, to offer as a bribe; but her great spirit was not yet so far subdued, and she said again, in a more authoritative voice than before—"I know you, James Hurst, disguised as you are; and I tell you if you do not push off this instant, I will utter a shriek that will bring other eyes upon you besides mine."

This threat had its weight with the party, who seemed to be simultaneously struck with the improbability of a young person like Margaret Allonby having come to that solitary and fearful place alone. That she had other members of her family stationed within reach of her voice, was an idea which they appeared surprised they had not thought of before; and while Margaret yet held her brother in her strong grasp, without being able to draw him

back more than a few paces from the water's edge, the oars were struck hastily into the foaming tide, and the boat and its lawless crew soon vanished from their sight.

To be defeated in a wicked purpose has generally the worst possible effect upon the heart and temper. Robert Allonby felt mortified and vexed that he had lowered himself in the opinion even of the lowest of mankind ; nor could the kind soothing of his sister soften the petulance with which he betrayed but too plainly how little he really thanked her for her interference. Margaret endured all this without remonstrance. She would have endured much more for the sake of gaining such a point —and, pleased and grateful for the accomplishment of her dearest wish, she accommodated herself so far to her brother's sullen mood as to walk with him in perfect silence up to her father's house. On entering the garden, she turned to him kindly, and said in her gentlest voice, “ Dear Robert, don't be under any anxiety about the affair of this evening being known further than you like. I left word that I was gone to the village ; and it would appear quite natural to every one that you had gone with me.”

Robert made no reply ; and in a few moments they were joined by Owen, who ap-

peared to be hastening away from the house at more than his accustomed speed. He passed them without a word ; but suddenly recollecting himself, asked of Margaret if he could speak one word with her alone.

"Is it true," said he, in a state of almost breathless agitation—"Is it true that preparations are going on for—for—"

"For Louisa's marriage with my brother James," said Margaret, very decidedly.

"And you!" exclaimed Owen—"you, Margaret Allonby, could see and know all this, and never tell me a word of it. An hour ago, I dreamed, when I thought of you, that I had a friend ; now I know you are but too like the rest of your sex—false—false!"

Owen said this with a bitterness which made poor Margaret absolutely shrink away from him—so strong, so fearful is the force of human feeling in its utmost might. Margaret knew she had been wrong ; yet she could not believe herself deserving of so hard a censure, and she retired at an early hour from the busy scenes her father's house presented, to reflect, in the solitude of her own chamber, upon the events of that day—and to ask of her heart and her conscience what was wrong, and how the evil might best be remedied.

## CHAPTER III.



T was on a beautiful morning in the early part of October, when the sky was without a cloud, when the leaves were motionless on the trees, and the crisp grass rustled underneath the sportsman's tread, that Margaret Allonby and her fair cousin looked out from the old-fashioned window of the apartment appropriated to their especial use, over a wide tract of country, interspersed with villages and hamlets, yellow corn-fields, heath and copse, and wood and dell—wanting in nothing but mountains, to render it both beautiful and sublime. For there, in the distance, was the blue expanse of ocean; and here and there a gallant bark upon its bosom, going forth like a winged messenger, into the unknown regions of the world.

"What a beautiful day!" said Margaret, "just the kind of morning one would choose for setting out on a journey; almost enough to make me envy you, Louisa, for, if ever I am married, I shall wish to prepare for it in such weather as this."

A deep sigh was all the answer Margaret received; and she turned away from the glowing landscape to look at her cousin, and, if possible, to ascertain whence came that sigh, and why she was not altogether happy.

A stranger who had seen the two cousins, would have instantly concluded that Margaret was the bride elect; so full of contentment, and of youthful hope, was her healthy and happy face; while Louisa, pale, languid, and melancholy, leaned, in a graceful and bending attitude, with one arm on the table, over which hung a tall mirror, alternately glancing at her own countenance, and then looking down at a wreath of white roses which she held listlessly in her hand, as if unwilling either to relinquish them entirely, or to consider them as the future ornament of her brow.

The apartment, too, was strewed with dresses of the most costly fabric, elegantly made, yet so carelessly disposed, that they seemed more as if cast aside, than acknowl-

edged as the property of a rightful owner. And this was preparing for her marriage !

"Louisa," said Margaret, "I don't think your heart is in this business yet. Do tell me what you wish, and I will labor for you night and day, to bring it about. Look out with me from this window. There is Branston Hall—at least the woods around it, and the wide fields, rich pastures, flocks and herds, and cottages, and laborers, with their families, whose mistress you will shortly be. Does not this satisfy you ?"

"Oh, yes," said Louisa, and she too rose, and looked out of the window. "It more than satisfies me."

"Then what is your heart pining for? Is James himself not all you could desire?"

"No," was the faint answer of Louisa. "Then let me tell him so," exclaimed Margaret, seizing both her hands. "You must not—you shall not marry him for the sake of being mistress of Branston Hall."

Louisa cast another glance at those rich woods, upon which the tints of autumn were still glowing—another glance at the bridal dresses, and the wreath she still held in her hand. There was everything to gratify the vanity of woman; but what was there for her heart?

A nearer portion of the landscape displayed the village of Heatherstone. The cottage windows gleaming in the sunshine, and the chimneys sending out their upward columns of white smoke, contrasted with the purple of the distant woods. One line of buildings so mean and regular, that Louisa seldom looked at them, were now distinctly seen, from the scattering of the summer leaves. Had one of these, the humble lodging of the curate, been more worthy of the mind which dwelt within, how little would she then have thought of the rich domain where stood her future home! To her, however, mind was comparatively unimportant only so far as it gratified her vanity the more, to be admired by a man of cultivated understanding. Thus, when she weighed the good and evil of her future lot, it seemed to her sometimes a prouder triumph to win the affections of Owen, than to rule as the mistress of Branston Hall.

"But you cannot wish to be loved by one man, and to marry another," said Margaret, who always pressed the subject home in the plain language of unvarnished truth. "I am sure you never would be so wicked as to do 'hat."

Louisa always replied with petulance to such

remarks, for nothing is more unpleasant than to have a fancied and romantic good set before us as a positive and vulgar evil. Would that every woman, whose own heart is a treacherous counsellor, had a friend beside her, as faithful and plain-spoken as Margaret!

Yet Margaret could be romantic in her own way ; for what woman cannot ? But it was only on subjects of high moral feeling that her enthusiasm burst forth. Wherever oppression or cruelty met her view, her eye flashed indignation, and her high soul rebelled against the shackles of society, which kept her, as a woman, feeble and helpless. Wherever she saw the delicate and the sensitive overborne by the powerful and the rude, she fearlessly took part with the weaker side ; but especially where she beheld woman untrue to that high character of purity and unselfishness, with which her imagination invested her, and deprived of which, she believed that woman must ever be contemptible in society, and unhappy and degraded in her own mind : then she was an enthusiast indeed, for the warmth of her heart knew no bounds in her advocacy of good, or her contempt of evil.

Margaret knew within her own heart that she herself could have been faithful to any man

she had deemed worthy of her love, through poverty and neglect—through trial and temptation ; and strong in this conviction, it was difficult for her to understand how her cousin—how any woman, indeed, could weigh in the balance, where her affections were engaged, either houses, or lands, or any other earthly good. This was her kind of romance. But with Louisa the case was widely different, and, therefore, it was not very likely that the arguments Margaret made use of should have much weight, while the broad fields belonging to Branston Hall, and the deep woods which surrounded that ancestral dwelling, lay smiling in the sunshine, and perpetually in view ; more especially when they were so strikingly contrasted with the humble habitation of the curate of Heatherstone. James Allonby, too, had an influence peculiar to men of his stamp—an influence in the position he assumed in society, and which no one appeared disposed to dispute with him—an influence in the fine horses and the fierce dogs which formed so important a part of his establishment—an influence in his own portly person, bold front, and manly bearing, as well as in the commanding voice, and domineering manner, and the general movement and shock in the established

order of things which attended his coming. Whether he was morally a great man, or whether he would have been great apart from all adventitious circumstances, few people were audacious enough to inquire ; for the loud tones of his voice, the crack of his whip, the snorting of his high-bred charger, the tumult of his dogs, and his own personal size and weight, with all the flourish of fearless assumption,—made way for him wherever he went ; and the young Squire of Branston was already beginning to eclipse in importance the more experienced proprietor of the other half of the estate.

Perfectly satisfied with his own pre-eminent claims upon the admiration of the female sex in general, James Allonby was not likely to suspect that any lurking interest in favor of the young clergyman could for a moment interfere with his influence over the mind of Louisa. Nor in reality had he much to fear on this ground. Louisa Linton's heart was but too deeply engaged in what she believed to constitute the sum of worldly interest. Her taste might be gratified, her fancy might wander, but all the affection she was capable of was true--if not to James Allonby, at least to the master of Branston.

Thus it was that the preparations for the

marriage went on without hindrance or delay. One of the most painful thoughts which flashed across the mind of Owen in connexion with this subject was, that he himself would be called upon to perform the ceremony ; but as his natural pride had already come to his aid so far as to enable him to continue his accustomed duties at the Grange without betraying the different emotions which contended for mastery in his bosom, so he nerved himself for this occasion also, and even felt a strange wild triumph in the conviction that he was capable of going through with all that was required of him without flinching from a single duty.

Never was bride more gracefully attired than Louisa as she stood at the altar that day. It was but a country-scene after all, and the people of the village very naturally thought that something might have been spared for the poor at such a time. A handful of silver was all, however, which James Allonby thought of bestowing, and he threw this on the ground as he stepped into his carriage, more for the pleasure of creating a rush, a shout, and a scramble, than for any good it was likely to do.

The festivity of a wedding-day, after the bride and bridegroom are gone, is often rather difficult to sustain. A few social and friendly

neighbors had been invited to spend the day at the Grange ; but Mrs. Allonby was more than usually harassed—Margaret was grave ; and, as is but too frequently the case where mind has but little mastery over matter, all seemed to look to good eating and drinking for supplying the stimulus of which they were in want.

Owen Meredith, though he would that day have preferred hiding himself in a cave, or feeding in uninterrupted seclusion on the bread and water of the veriest anchorite, had been prevailed upon to join the party ; and he did this with the same determination which had lately influenced all his actions, that the real state of his mind might more effectually escape detection. At all times the mere common-place of ordinary conversation was irksome to him ; but now it was doubly so, and there was a peculiar dulness in the company convened on that occasion, which affected his nerves with a secret sense of oppression too painful to be endured. In vain the Squire applied himself to his accustomed wine ; in vain he boasted his loyalty, drank healths to the royal family, and dragged in his well-known but inappropriate jokes. All would not do ; and Owen had fallen into a deep reverie, when suddenly startled by a smart slap on the shoulder, and a question from one of the

older youths, whether he was thinking of his false love.

A burning crimson at that moment rushed to Owen's cheek. Was his secret then, discovered? No; he would make one effort more. At that very moment the wine stood beside him. There had been a conspiracy among the young Allonbys that they would make him drink the health of the bride and bridegroom on Louisa's wedding-day; and now the proposal was made, and Owen filled his glass like the rest.

On those whose only beverage is water, and who are besides dispirited and languid, a single glass of wine is capable of producing more excitement than would appear possible to persons in a different state of mind and body. With Owen the Rubicon was now passed. His vow was broken; and he felt that between him and danger there was no barrier left. He felt this, but he felt it without any adequate alarm. A new sensation was creeping through his veins—a glow was at his heart. He cared not to what extent he might increase it. He was reckless of consequences. He heard the young Allonbys whispering to each other—he saw their suppressed laughter—and he who had hitherto been so painfully susceptible of ridicule, feared no man. He grew vain and talka-

tive, led on by the mischievous youths, who considered themselves as having got up an excellent scene. Lastly—for one sweeping conclusion is enough—Owen was led up stairs, after having betrayed all it had been his study during the past month to conceal, as well as having been guilty of every foolish boast to which the circumstances of the day and the previous state of his own mind could give occasion.

One would certainly suppose that the uprising on the morning after such a scene, the meeting with observant eyes, and the return, after such a loss of dignity, to the accustomed pursuits and occupations of a rational man, would be sufficiently humiliating of itself to work a cure, did not our observation of human life convince us to the contrary. With Owen, however, the case was a more than usually painful one. Awaking at a late hour in the morning with the sunshine glaring through his curtains, and a headache absolutely enough to deafen him, he was sufficiently alive to present things to know that his appearance would be hailed by his pupils with every demonstration of triumph and delight at having obtained so complete a victory over his resolution and self-command. He even heard them already throw-

ing handfuls of gravel up to his window, until a voice, which he could not doubt was Margaret's, called them away, and then all was silent, and he was left to his own reflections.

Yes, one would think that the song of the birds in a bright sunny morning; the opening of the fresh flowers, each with its coronet of pearly dew; the whispering of the fresh pure wind among the leafy trees; the flow of crystal water; the bleating of happy flocks; and the husbandman's renewal of healthy and wholesome toil beneath the canopy of heaven, whose own wide fields of azure reflect no stain, or spot, or blemish from the paths of human frailty which mar the beauty of the world below—one would think that all this awaiting guilty man on his first uprising from the senseless slumber of intemperance, would remind him almost too forcibly that he alone of all the creatures of that fair and glorious world had voluntarily resigned the highest attributes of his nature—had willingly relinquished the noble powers which God had given him—and, lying down at night without gratitude and without praise, had consigned himself to a spiritual death, from which it was no part of his solicitude whether or not he ever should awaken. One would think the bare reflection that no other creature in the universe

besides him who was created in the image of his heavenly Father, is so unthankful, so blind, or so gross, as to cast away the greatest blessing received at his gracious hand, would sometimes startle him with at least a momentary apprehension, lest when the lamp of reason was designedly extinguished, it never might be re-illumined—lest, like the monarch of old, he should be sent forth from the fellowship of intellectual and immortal beings, to graze and to grovel with the brutes.

Such were the reflections which rushed across the mind of Owen when he awoke on that miserable morning ; but the bitterness with which they were accompanied bore nothing of a wholesome or a healing nature. His vow once broken, Owen regarded himself as a lost man. He did not recollect that the spirit of a sacred engagement may be kept inviolate after the letter has been broken ; and that after having once overstepped the bounds of safety prescribed to him by his lost parent, he was the more imperatively called upon again to submit his actions to the same wholesome restraint, and to do this as strictly and as faithfully as he valued the memory of his mother.

Margaret Allonby was the first to meet Owen when he descended to the garden that morning

She made no reference to the preceding night, but told him with evident satisfaction that she had persuaded her brothers to go out into the fields ; and as the next day was Saturday, a day on which Owen claimed exemption from attendance on his pupils, Margaret strongly advised his retiring to his own home until after another Sunday. Even now she opened for him the little gate into the field through which the path led to the village, and looking back to see that he had not been observed from the house, she closed the gate behind her, and walked with him some way down the path, which for a considerable distance was shaded by a thick hedge, interspersed with lofty trees.

" I have no wish," said Margaret, after they had walked some paces in perfect silence, " to intrude unnecessarily upon your thoughts at such a time as this ; but I am more troubled than I can tell you about this affair of my brother Robert's, and I want your advice as to how I ought to act."

Margaret then unburdened her mind of a load which had been accumulating there ever since the night of her brother's intended escape. It was not in Robert's nature long to maintain that sullen and incommunicable spirit toward his sister ; and won over as he had

finally been by her faithful and untiring affection, he had disclosed to her the whole secret of his association with the Hursts.

And a dark and disgraceful secret it was. Like many other petulant youths, goaded on to imagined desperation by the alternate severity and neglect of ill-judging parents, Robert had commenced his career of folly by rebellion against his father's authority. In this act of precocious manliness he was, however, checked by that wholesome restraint which exercises so powerful an effect upon many a youthful hero—the want of pecuniary means to carry out his own secret plans. He had been accustomed, in the days of his boyish pastime, to hear the boasting of the young Hursts, both as to their good luck and good management in the great business of obtaining resources ; and now that they were more anxious than ever to cultivate his acquaintance, he had little difficulty in meeting them so far as to hear how much they had to say against his father's unfair assumption of authority, as well as how much vulgar praise they could lavish upon his own spirit of resistance. It had been, in short, so much the interest of the Hursts to cultivate the acquaintance of so hopeful an agent in their service as Robert Allonby, that the intimacy progressed

rapidly from one stage to another, until that treacherous system of poaching and petty theft which the master of Heatherstone Grange wielded all the terrors of his public and private influence to subdue, found no more efficient abettor than his own son, who, while he ingeniously protected the delinquents, shared, though but sparingly, in the profits of their secret spoils.

In the first discovery made of this system, which had fixed suspicion upon the Hursts, Robert Allonby had been in no way implicated. He could not but feel, however, that the treacherous foundation on which he stood was shaken—and as the first act of concealed and deliberate crime of which youth is guilty, almost always has the effect of overloading the balance of the mind in favor of evil in general, so every circumstance which afterward occurred to the wayward boy seemed to drive him further and further from the path of duty and of peace. Still he had yearnings of heart after better things, beyond what many feel whose lives have been more innocent from guilt ; and never were these feelings so powerful as when associated with his sister Margaret in hours of unrestrained and happy intercourse. How had he often longed at such moments to tell her all his wicked thoughts and acts, and consequent

unhappiness!—for Robert was far from being hardened in the evil course he had chosen. He was the victim of a perverse and fitful temper—one of those vacillating characters whose good and evil are alike uncertain, and whose experience is generally made up of sinning and repenting, without any definite motive in either beyond the impulse of the present moment.

The most immediate difficulty, however, which pressed upon him at this time, arose out of a disruption which had lately taken place between him and his quondam associates. Indeed, the whole family, like all who are in possession of each other's guilty secrets, lived in a constant state of suspicion and evil thoughts against each other, which the slightest failure in any of their plans was at all times liable to kindle into the flame of open discord.

In that system of poaching and other kinds of depredation upon the property of the neighbouring farmers, and especially upon the Allonby estate, Robert had taken no other part than to lead off the attention of his father and brothers from the real culprits; but still he was too far implicated to feel any degree of satisfaction in his present position, now that he and the Hursts were no longer on friendly terms; and ever since the affair of the boat, there had

been a peculiarity of manner toward himself whenever he came in contact with any of them, which made him sometimes suspect either that his own safety or that of his family was in danger.

In the disclosure which Margaret Allonby now made to him who ought to have been her spiritual adviser, she had more than one important end in view. Her most immediate object was to ask the advice of Owen as to how far she was justified in laying before her father statements which had only been made to her in strict confidence, and made simply as the result of self-condemnation and remorse.

"These are feelings," replied Owen, "which ought certainly to be made subservient to the public good. If it is necessary to the protection of your father's property that these facts should be disclosed, and if you have made no promise to the contrary, it is your imperative duty to do all in your power to rid the neighborhood of such a pest as this family has too long been."

"Then I will talk to my father this very night," said Margaret, "as soon as he returns, though I fear that will be late, for I heard him say he was going to dine at Major Grant's.

"And now, dear sir," she continued, the color

deepening in her face as she spoke, for Margaret never could divest herself of the idea that in the person of Owen, as the clergyman of the parish, there was something dignified, and almost sacred—"there is another subject," she added, almost reverently, "to which I would call your attention; will you forgive me, if I presume further than you like?"

"I will forgive you—at least I ought; but, Margaret, you must spare me this time."

"Oh, do not say so!—who knows what may occur before to-night? It never can be too soon, it may at any future moment be too late, to begin a sacred duty."

"What is it you would say? Be silent, and I will say it for you: That I have disgraced my office in the church, my character as a man; that I have rendered myself despicable—infamous; that I have broken the vow I uttered on my father's grave; and that, if the spirits of the blest can grieve, my sainted mother now looks with anguish upon her lost child!"

"You mistake me altogether," said Margaret, looking up with an expression of kindness and simplicity—"not one word of all this was I about to say; all this refers to the past alone, and with the past I have nothing to do. What I have to say refers to the present and the fu-

ture—to myself, as well as to you. It has lately struck me very forcibly that we are all wrong—altogether wrong in our principles of action, motives, and feelings ; and I have learned this as much from what you yourself teach us every Sunday, as from the convictions of my own conscience. It seems to me that we are living every day just like so many mere animals, yet with the capabilities of beings formed for immortality. Now, what is to be the end of all this ?—already I feel the consequences of this way of living, in myself ; is it not beginning to tell in the lives and characters of my poor brothers ? and are not you, my dear sir, too much like the rest of us—living on for the day, or for the hour, rather than for eternity ? It is not my place to dictate to you ; perhaps I am venturing too far, even by these remarks ; but, oh, dear sir, what a happy influence you might exercise over my brothers, if your own conduct was regulated by the rules you lay down for others."

"It is too late, Margaret, it is too late ;—a week ago, you might have spoken to some purpose ; I am fallen too low now, both in my own esteem and that of others."

" You are fallen no lower than you choose to fall. The man who has committed a fault

is not necessarily a worse man after he has committed it than he was before. Nay, the state of his mind immediately before the act may have been in reality more offensive in the sight of God than after the deed was done. I am not alluding particularly to what occurred last night, when I speak of your example ;—though, if I had been your sister, I would have given hundreds of pounds rather than that scene should have transpired. It is true you may have lost influence by what has passed, but not more than you may soon regain ; and one evident fault sincerely, nobly repented of, has often a better effect upon the minds of others than the most exemplary life. I say nobly repented of, because there is something noble in repenting without fear of man, in daring to be penitent before God, and receiving the chastisements of his hand as a well-disciplined child submits to the regulations of its father's house, because it knows them to be made in mercy and wisdom, alike for its own, and for the general good."

" But what can be the use of my repenting now ? The deed is done—my vow is broken."

" Broken in the letter only. The spirit of that vow you can renew at any moment of your life. And, think you, the sainted being who

laid that charge upon your lips would not add her song of triumph to the harmony of rejoicing angels if she could see you rising afresh from such a fall, calling upon all your powers with new energy to aid in the mastery of evil, and thus maintaining the noble conflict, until you are permitted to meet her in the courts of heaven? Oh, do not suffer yourself to think, that because you have sinned once, you must sin again. It is the grand delusion of minds too sensitive, like yours, to think that human virtue is like some silver gem, some snow-white plume, some tender flower, on which neither spot nor blemish can be impressed without the essence of that virtue being destroyed. It is not in your public ministry that you teach us thus. Our blessed religion has other and happier lessons, more adapted to the wants and the weakness of humanity—lessons which bring us again and again to the mercy-seat, to implore the pardon of our sins, and to ask for strength to go and sin no more."

Owen having no arguments to offer in defence of the gloomy views he was now indulging, and Margaret feeling that she had said enough, perhaps too much, they turned away to pursue their different avocations for the day.

So little was Owen accustomed to spend a

night away from his own humble home, that Mrs. Barber met him at the door with evident curiosity to know what had caused this infraction of the rules of her house. He was in no humor now to answer her many sifting questions in the manner she wished,—and passing into the little parlor which had been the scene of so many of his sad thoughts, as well as of some of his brightest dreams, he sat down for the purpose of indulging his morbid feelings to their widest range of despondency and gloom.

“What would you please to have for dinner?” asked Mrs. Barber, peeping in with her most business-like face.

“Don’t talk to me of dinner,” replied Owen hastily; “bring me anything you have, or nothing.”

“Nothing! why bless your heart, sir, people must eat.”

“Then I’ll eat to-morrow,” said Owen, taking up his hat to leave the house.

“But I’m doubting,” said the woman, with a look of real concern, as she placed herself in the way of the young gentleman’s exit; “I’m doubting if the mutton will please you so well to-morrow.”

From his first encounter with Mrs. Barber, Owen had felt himself a persecuted man. This

last stroke was nothing less than an insult to his feelings, and he hastened out of the house, hoping to find that retirement which he so much needed, on the seashore or in the fields. Over that high bleak tract of land which extended to the cliff, he therefore bent his steps ; and, charmed with the solitude of the wild shore, he paced for a long time to and fro on the wet sands, without observing that his movements were watched by a little ragged boy, who scrambled down the cliff in peril of his life. The first intimation of intrusion which Owen received, was from the fall of a mass of loose gravel ; and on looking round, he saw the boy eagerly beckoning him to come nearer.

"Impertinence again !" said Owen ; "am I never to be alone ?" and with a strong determination to maintain his own dignity, in whatever manner it might be assailed, he walked away from the spot with as much speed as the preservation of this dignity would permit ; while the boy, afraid of being defeated in his object, began to call loudly to him to stop.

"Am I thus to be at the beck and the bidding of every miscreant who chooses to interrupt me ?" exclaimed Owen ;—yet, chained to the spot, as people naturally are by hearing themselves violently called upon to go no further,

he waited in no courteous mood to receive the errand of this strange messenger. A dirty slip of crumpled paper explained the business he was charged with. Owen read it with evident contempt, tore the paper, and scattered the fragments on the ground.

"You will come, then?" said the boy, looking as if he perfectly understood the nature of his errand.

"Of course I will," replied Owen, "but it must be at my own convenience. If I never refuse to visit the sick of my parish, I may surely be allowed to choose my own time."

"Certainly," said the boy, "if you can make them live till you come."

"Go back," said Owen, in a tone of high authority; "you have executed your commission. Tell your grandmother I will be with her some time this evening."

"This evening!" exclaimed the boy; "it will be too late—indeed, sir, it will."

"Is she so ill, then?" asked Owen.

"Why, not so very ill, sir, but"—and the boy hesitated: "you will repent of it, sir, that you will, if you don't come now."

"I will not be the tool of your impertinence," said Owen; "begone!"—and he turned haughtily away from the boy, who slowly retraced

his steps to the cliff. Arrived at the rugged path which was to conduct him to the summit of the high ground above, he called again, more loudly than before, renewing his assurance that no time was to be lost, and his threat that Owen would repent of it, if he did not comply with his grandmother's request.

It is with great difficulty that any one is turned away from pursuing a wrong purpose. Owen had secretly determined that that day should be spent in the indulgence of his own feelings, regardless of those of any other being upon earth. He had determined also that he would yield himself entirely to the influence of gloomy thoughts, that he had a right to do so, and that it was a privilege of which no one had the power to deprive him. He therefore remained wandering on the beach until a much later hour than it would otherwise have been agreeable to his feelings to do so, simply for the satisfaction of following out his own purpose in spite of circumstances, and, worse still, in spite of duty.

The sun was already far in the west, and the laborers were returning home, when Owen climbed the high cliff, to which in fact he had been driven by the advancing tide; and as the cottage of old Ailie Hurst, to which he was

bound, stood at the opposite extremity of the village, before he reached the door, the shadows of evening had rendered that forlorn and unattractive spot still more gloomy than it appeared by the full light of day. On the narrow road which led from the public way to the carrier's door, between two dirty ponds, where ducks and geese were usually seen, stood the little urchin who had done his grandmother's behest in conveying her billet ; and the moment Owen came in sight, he retreated to the hut, as if he had been stationed there to watch for his coming.

Repelled, as the delicate senses of the young curate were, by every aspect of vulgarity, he would rather have been called upon to preach ten sermons to a genteel congregation than to say one word in private to such a woman as Ailie Hurst. Still he believed it to be his duty to attend upon the suffering and the sick, and he nerved himself to the task accordingly. What, then, was his surprise, on approaching the bedside of this old woman, to feel his arm so firmly grasped that he doubted for a moment whether he was not in the power of one of her stalwart grandsons !—while the countenance of the apparent sufferer, now absolutely distorted with impatience, was raised so as almost

to touch his own. In this attitude she breathed her story into his listening ear. It was evidently no story of her own sufferings, for the expression upon Owen's face was not one of sympathy, but of horror and indignation, and of haste to be gone. Still, however, she detained him, and there was no resisting that iron grasp. Still she detained him, for there were many important particulars to explain.

"But, hark! what sound was that?" she whispered, laying her finger on her lips; and the boy, at the same time, made a particular movement with his feet upon the floor.

"Take no notice now," said the woman, sinking back on the bed—"move very slowly; and, whatever you do, don't appear to be in haste."

She then entered into a detail of her bodily sufferings; during which, if Owen showed any signs of impatience, she again lifted up her finger, with a look which sufficiently indicated the danger there was of the nature of her communication being even so much as suspected. Owen also thought he heard the whispering of strange voices outside the door and window. He was naturally no stranger to fear; and what he had heard this night might have shaken firmer nerves than his. It might be that the

very urgency of the case, the immediate need there was for action, supported him,—for he took the tone of the old woman, and even condoled with her on her sufferings ; though all the while his hair stood up from his forehead, while drops of perspiration gathered there, and his whole frame was trembling, so that a stranger's eye might easily have detected his emotion.

Trusting that his retreat might now be made with safety, Owen exchanged a few words of common civility with the old woman, and left the cottage. He knew that whatever danger might threaten him, it was now commencing ; yet he held on his way with a step erect, though at the same time with a speed beyond what is required by any common occasion.

He had already cleared one short field from the village, when a rustling was heard on the other side of the fence, and the words, “ Not so fast,” and “ Go by the Willow Croft,” were uttered by an almost breathless voice, which he knew to be that of the boy whose embassy on the seashore he had so blindly and foolishly disregarded.

The path by the Willow Croft was at least half a mile further than that which Owen had chosen, and to go by this route, and to go slowly, seemed almost too much for his patience

and self-possession. Certain, however, that to disobey the injunctions of such an informant as Old Ailie, would be most effectually to defeat his object, he walked straight into a narrow dell, where the path was so closely hemmed in by copse-wood and willows, that it would have been impossible for him to know, had any one been disposed to track his footsteps.

The highest part of what was called the Willow Croft, immediately overlooked the orchard, farmyard, and back premises of Heatherstone Grange. Before Owen had reached this part of the field, he was sensible of a strange distinctness about the tops of the trees and the hedge which bounded his horizon. Unable now to make any further calculations upon the consequences of his own movements, he sprang over the gate which separated him from the lane, and in another moment was in the centre of the noble stack-yard of the Grange, where an awful spectacle presented itself to his view. At the base of every stack, light blue flames were beginning to appear—so numerous, and so widely spread, that it was evident the destructive element must have been introduced by an agency more effectual than mere accident.

Bewildered with the scene before him, Owen paused one moment to reflect upon the wisest

measures to adopt in the absence of the Squire and his sons. To awaken the terrors of Mrs. Allonby was like setting fire to a train of confusion, the consequences of which no human being could calculate upon. Besides which, the house was still safe, and unless the wind changed, there was every probability that it would remain so. Owen, therefore, flew to the cottage of a laborer who lived close by, and desiring him to call out the men-servants from the hall, despatched one of them on the fleetest horse in the stable, to bring home Mr. Allonby and his sons.

In the mean time the fire was gaining on every hand. The men-servants, who had all retired to rest, looked at each other bewildered and confounded ; and, without a leader to direct them what to do, hastened this way and that, unconscious of any definite object in what they did. Owen alone retained his self-possession. Like many of those sensitive characters whose feelings are too delicate for common use, he would have been the last man that any one would have applied to in a desperate emergency, requiring moral as well as physical energy ; yet Owen, with all his gentleness, possessed a mine of mental power, which, when properly directed, is of infinitely more value

than mere brute force. Had Squire Allonby been there, with all his bustle and his bluster, it is more than probable that Owen would have shrunk from the field of action, or have maintained a comparatively useless post ; but, feeling that there was no one else to take the command of affairs, he seemed in that very moment to step forth into life under a new character. The men-servants, who were at first disposed to dispute his authority, became absolutely overawed by the promptness of his decision, and the clearness with which his orders were given ; while his slight and graceful figure, moving from place to place amid that scene of uproar and destruction, looked more like a spirit than a man. All his efforts, however, though put in force by so many able hands, were unavailing to stop the ravages of the devouring element, so surely had the malignant plot been laid. The flames had now gained such mastery that they seemed to lick with their fiery tongues the victims they were about to devour, while they curved with arrowy light around each sombre mass, and threw a strange and lurid splendor upon the foliage of the surrounding trees.

Owen, sensible that the wind was changing, had for some time been too intent upon discovering every new symptom of ignition in that

part of the premises adjoining the house, to think of what might be transpiring within the walls, when shrieks that seemed to echo to the starry vault above, announced that terror, if not actual danger, had reached the helpless occupants of the mansion. Owen looked up—women or children were escaping from every door. But this was not all. A rapidly increasing light was seen to glare through the windows of one apartment, a sort of out-building, separated from the house, yet so slightly that scarcely less than a miracle could save the whole structure. Now then was the real danger. Now was the conflict too great for one man to bear alone, and how did Owen turn every moment and look and listen for the return of the master of the house ! He came at last. The thundering tread of horses at full speed was heard along the avenue ; the master and his sons arrived—and how ? They had been dining out ; they had partaken freely, according to the usages of the country, of their neighbor's hospitality, and whatever their feelings of alarm or grief might be, not one of them had a head sufficiently clear to know what ought to be done. From the quarter whence Owen had expected help, he had, therefore, to encounter discord and confusion. Orders were given by one, and countermanaged

by another ; none could keep in mind his own purpose ; and the ruin of all that was material seemed about to be consummated by the previous overthrow of the right balance of mind.

Confounded and dispirited, Owen had clasped his hands together in a fit of anguish and despair, when Margaret stood beside him perfectly collected, but with her lips as pale as ashes, and she spoke with breathless haste—

“ My mother and the children are all safe,” said she, “ in the summer-house, and the servants are there too, but nobody recollects poor little Mary asleep in the nursery ; come with me, wrap me in something that will keep off the fire—for see ! see ! it is close to that room that the flames are raging.”

Owen and Margaret flew to the spot ; the former was soon seen ascending a ladder to the window of the nursery, his head bound round with a wet cloth which Margaret had provided for him, and in another moment he stood with the infant at the open casement. Never was a welcome more fervent than that with which Margaret received it in her extended arms.—“ Now, now !” she cried, “ we are all safe ; let the flames do their worst ; they cannot part us now.”

So long as Owen had felt himself the moving

spring of action, neither his strength nor his determination had failed ; but now, when his best endeavors were defeated by the disorder and mismanagement of others,—now when he was no longer called upon for invention or effort,—he sunk, as exhausted nature is wont to do under such circumstances, and, heedless of the conflagration around him, would have remained upon the steps of the hall-door, had not Margaret implored him to seek some place of greater safety. Nor were her entreaties all : fainting as she was, she bade him lean upon her arm, and with the child in the other, she thus supported both until they reached a seat in the yew-tree garden, where they could hear and see the devastation of the raging element without fear of its invading their retreat.

“ Are you better now ?” said Margaret ; “ are you well enough to be left alone ?—for I must hasten to my poor mother.”

“ Stay one moment longer,” said Owen.

“ I will stay, I will do anything that I can to serve you, only tell me what it is ; for you have this night risked your life again and again for us Oh tell me what I can do to serve you.”

“ You can be my sister—my friend !” said Owen, faintly.

I will !” exclaimed Margaret, “ I will, as

Heaven will be my help and guide. But you must be your own friend too, or how can my efforts be availing?"

"How?"

"You must be your better self; you must remember this night of how much you are capable; and let it rouse you into acting nobly and consistently, and in a manner worthy of your high and sacred calling."

—"But my vow, Margaret—I had forgotten my broken vow."

"Think not of that, except as it may warn you for the future. If in one sad night you have been made acquainted with your own weakness and your own danger, let the morrow find you so far a wiser man, that you will never trust to the same temptation again. Renew that sacred vow, with a twofold determination to keep it henceforth inviolate. Imagine that your mother sees and hears you, and is conscious of your sincerity; and if an earthly parent would own and welcome a second resolution made upon the ruin of the first, how much more your heavenly Father, whose promises and whose discipline are alike calculated for those who come back like the prodigal, and say, 'Father, I have sinned in thy sight, and before heaven!'"

While Margaret was still speaking, shouts of joy announced that assistance had arrived from another quarter. Fire-engines were brought to play upon the mansion, but a small portion of which had suffered from the flames. Order was at the same time restored by those who were accustomed to act with authority on such occasions ; and though the loss of property was great, the dawn of morning found the Squire and his family safely re-established in their ancient home.

## CHAPTER IV.



HREE years had elapsed after the memorable night of the fire at the Grange, when two horsemen, one fine summer's morning, rode slowly and silently along the road from Branstion Hall to the village of Heatherstone. They could scarcely be supposed to be weary, the distance they had travelled was so short; yet they both pulled their hats over their heated brows on the side from whence the sun's rays were shining, and one of them complained bitterly of a headache, while the other spoke peevishly to his horse, and even set spurs into his sides for flinching from the flies which seemed ready to devour him. It was evident that both were in the worst possible humor—vexed with the hot sun, vexed with the insects, and, perhaps, if the truth had been fully told, vexed with themselves.

Peter Allonby, the elder horseman, had grown stouter, coarser, and in every respect more vulgar, during the lapse of the last three years ; while Robert, whom his sister used to think so handsome, wore on his countenance the traces of deep passions, not unmixed with deeper vice. In the elder brother, the animal was rapidly assuming its mastery over the man ; in the younger, there were glimpses of a nature darker and more dangerous than mere animal life presents ;—and both were returning home after a day of country hospitality at Branston Hall, where James Allonby, the now portly and authoritative master, was accustomed to preside over a well-furnished table ; while his sickly, slighted wife either retired to her novel in the nursery, or enjoyed her revenge, by complaining, to a coterie of humble admirers, of those insults and general grievances which she never for a single moment studied how to prevent.

“ Let us turn in upon the parson,” said Peter Allonby, as they approached the village ; “ he will either be planting his potatoes, or putting his child to bed.”

The two brothers agreed to do as Peter had proposed ; and the better to enjoy the sport of taking the parson, as they called him, by surprise, they fastened their horses to a neighbor-

ing tree, and stole gently past the corner of the beautiful cottage, which had lately obtained the name of the Parsonage. .

We have said it was a sunbright morning in summer : the dew was yet upon the grass, but the lark was high in the heavens, and all around the warblers of the woods and fields were filling the fresh air with such a thrill of melody as must have gone to the heart of any one who listened for a moment to their song. That cottage-garden, too, was full of fresh flowers, and the sweetbrier, the pink, and the rambling honeysuckle sent forth their delicious perfume to mingle with the scent of new-mown hay. But who shall paint their gorgeous coloring, or describe the different charm of star, and coronet, and leafy spray, and over all that rich and mellow light which gave to the dark trees a deeper shade, and threw the winding walks and grassy slopes of that sweet garden into mysterious and flitting beauty beneath the trembling shadow of the tall acacia, the poplar, and the waving ash !

The cottage-door was sheltered by a porch, extending into trellis-work, and wreathed about with rambling plants—yet not so closely but that the light fell through, and there, beneath that canopy, was seated Owen Meredith, and his wife, once Margaret Allonby, with her in-

fant in her arms. The father was reading from the sacred page of a Bible which lay upon his knee ; while the mother gazed intently on a page more difficult to read—the face of her sleeping child.

The two brothers looked by stealth upon this scene, and Peter Allonby was highly entertained at the idea of breaking suddenly upon it ; but Robert pulled his hat over his brow, and leaned in silence with both his arms upon the paling which separated the garden from the road.

“ Now,” said Peter, “ let us have at them.” But Robert stood still.

“ I’ll tell you what,” said he at last, “ I would give all I have in the world, to be reading my Bible in that cottage, with such a wife as Margaret by my side.”

A loud laugh from Peter put an end at once to their concealment, and to the quiet occupations of those within the porch. They were, of course, invited in ; for it was a point of conscience with Owen, never to refuse the rites of hospitality to any of Margaret’s relations ; and he was the more solicitous on this subject, because he added not to these rites the stimulants to which her brothers were but too much addicted.

"As we never use such things ourselves," he was accustomed to say, "nor offer them to our guests, we are the more bound to be willing at all times to set before them such refreshments as we have, in order that they may not mistake our motives, or think we merely want a plea for getting rid of their society."

If it was beautiful to mark the holy calm and sweet serenity of that scene, while the father and the mother pursued, undisturbed, the current of their separate thoughts, it was no less so to behold the promptness, the cheerfulness, and the perfect charity, with which both arose, to give a welcome to guests, not by any means the most congenial to their tastes and feelings. With Owen, the task of duty was comparatively slight; but Margaret, whose domestic associates were very few, was obliged to consign her infant to other care, and to bestir herself in the preparation of a breakfast for her brothers. Yet she did this in so kind and cordial a manner, as well as with such perfect skill in preparing what was most adapted to appetites in the state of theirs, that Peter sat down with evident satisfaction, to make, what he considered the best thing under the sun—a hearty meal.

Robert, on whose more irritable frame the excesses, of which he was so often guilty, pro-

duced more lasting consequences, was not so easily won out of his depression and ill-humor. Perhaps, the great difference was, he had less bodily power, and consequently less appetite. Leaning both his elbows on the table, he raised the thick curls of his raven hair from his aching forehead, and asked, in no very complacent manner, for a tumbler of sherry, or something to give him nerve for the day.

'Owen was doubting whether to comply with his request, when Margaret gently, but firmly, placed her hand upon her brother's arm. "See here," said she, "I have made you coffee just as you like it. I am sure it is better for you than wine; and, besides, you know that wine is contrary to the rules of our house.'

"The rules of your house!" exclaimed Robert, with contempt. "Who cares for the rules of a house like this?"

Margaret saw that a storm was rising, and, fearful of the consequences upon the feelings of her husband, she asked him to go out, and see that her brother's horses were taken care of.

Owen, however, had no disposition to leave his wife to combat with such rude spirits alone; and Robert, whose fiery and bitter temper was now at its height, went on.

"Rules of your house, indeed! Every body

knows they are the rules of your inclination, and made to accommodate your purse."

Owen rose from his seat, with his color heightened, and walked a few paces across the room. "If I am poor," he began; but Margaret, who had made some errand to that part of the room where he stood, whispered in his ear, "Take care, dear Owen, what you say; remember, you are a minister of the gospel, and leave all this to me."

"Go on," said Robert, "whisper, and plot against me as you like; but now that I have begun, I mean to be candid with you, and tell you what my father says on the subject. He says, that if he had had the least idea that you, Mr. Meredith, intended to carry out this system of starvation, he would never have allowed my sister Margaret to be your wife."

This was, indeed, touching the feelings of the man to whom it was addressed, in a tender point; and serious might have been the consequences, had not Margaret again interposed.

"Robert," said she, in her firmest and most commanding tone, "you are free to exercise upon us the playfulness of your satire; you are free to come in when you like, and sit down at our table, such as it is; but if you mean, by what you have said, a personal insult to my

husband, you shall find that I, who have loved you so long, and so faithfully—yes, that I will be the first to close our doors against you."

"There will be little need for that," muttered Robert, between his half-closed lips; "for if I guess right, this is the last time I shall cross your threshold."

When silence succeeds to such an explosion of angry feeling, it needs more than common tact to bring about anything like social conversation. Margaret did this on the present occasion, by addressing herself to her brother Peter, on subjects which were, in reality, the most foreign to her thoughts. It was not possible, however, to regain anything like general cheerfulness, and the two guests rose to take their leave without so much as a wish being expressed that they would prolong their stay.

"I think I have left my whip," said Robert, returning hastily to the cottage, after Peter had mounted his horse; and while Owen stood by the garden-gate. "And now, Margaret," said he, for he saw that his sister was weeping—"my own dear Margaret, will you forgive me?"

It was not necessary to say more. His sister's arms were around his neck, her kiss was upon his brow, before she had time to tell

him how free, how entire, was her forgiveness. Indeed, what words could have been so convincing, as that fond caress—the same he had so often felt in the yew-tree garden, when their hearts were not so widely separated as now—when he had not shown before her and the world, before men and angels, before the Creator of earth and heaven, that he despised his laws, rejected his gospel, and would none of his consolations ?

“ I cannot part with you,” said Margaret. “ You are going, I know not where, into the great world, among all its temptations. Promise me one thing, and I will let you go. Promise me, that if the time should ever come, when you are friendless, homeless, and destitute of health and happiness ; yet with a wish, even the very faintest, to return to the ways of peace—promise me, that you will come back to me, wherever, or whatever I may be.”

“ I do promise,” said Robert, with his hands clasped, and his eyes upraised. “ And now, farewell ! for it is no idle threat. My father has at last obtained me a commission in the army, and I leave home to-morrow, most probably never to return.”

It was true, as Robert had said. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. Allonby, in suffering their sons to pass

through the nursery to the stable, had ever calculated upon what would be the final result of such a state of disorder and misrule as the interior of the establishment at Heatherstone Grange presented. Still less had they ever reflected upon the responsibility of sending forth into the world so many immortal beings, unoccupied by any pursuits but those which are common to the lowest grade of humanity, and unprotected by any principles but those which relate to mutual interest and good-fellowship in the community at large.

In the course of years, however, this system of mismanagement began to tell upon the characters of the different members of the Allonby family. The careless became coarse, the bold became brutal, and those who were reckless of authority became insolent and imperative. It was surprising, that among such rude and boisterous spirits Owen Meredith should retain either respect or power. Yet so it was, at least during their hours of tuition, and the master of the house respected him accordingly ;—for he could not be blind to the fact that, notwithstanding all his assumption of command, Owen in reality exercised an authority greater than his own. Margaret also rose, by comparison with her brothers, in the estimation of her father ;

for, despite the humble position which he believed all women filled in the creation, there was a quiet dignity, a self-possession, a clearness of motive and principle in the conduct of his daughter, which almost awed him into respect ; and when first informed of the attachment between her and Owen, he could not but feel that their characters were in every respect calculated to exercise a happy influence upon each other.

It is true that in pecuniary matters, the connexion was far from being such as he would have chosen for his daughter ; but Owen, before he could have invited Margaret to leave her father's home for his, had had another curacy offered to him, which so far increased his income that he was able to take possession of the prettiest cottage in Heatherstone, which, with the help of Margaret's dowry, had been fitted up and rendered the peaceful and happy home already described.

All, however, was not perfect satisfaction within these peaceful walls, for Owen's temperament was subject to heights and depths, which no other woman could have regulated and accommodated herself to so well as Margaret. Still it was a constant task—a never-ending labor of love, to moderate his expecta-

tions, to calm his ruffled feelings, to heal his sensitive spirit, when wounded by the rough usage of the world, and to make him look upon human life as neither too lovely nor too repulsive, but simply as it is—in short, to make him look upon it through the medium of truth, rather than that of poetry or romance.

Had Owen, in the choice of a wife, been able to follow the bent of his first impressions, he would have had to lament, through the whole of his after life, that he had gratified his taste, rather than consulted his judgment, or submitted his choice to the test of principle. Whatever Louisa Linton might have been with him, she was divested, by her marriage with James Allonby, of all the pleasing colors in which her character had at first appeared. Whether it was that the selfishness of her husband awoke the same feeling in her own breast, or that it had always been there, few people gave themselves the trouble to inquire; but certainly the bickerings and disputes at Branston Hall afforded theme for many a gossip's story—while the master of the mansion looked in vain upon the scowling brow of his wife to find the beauty he had once beheld, or imagined to be there.

Far different was the case with Margaret. Those clear bright eyes, so deeply touching in

their expressive tenderness, so quick to perceive, so prompt to check, were the stainless mirror in which her husband saw reflected the good or the evil of each separate act of his life. Equally subject to fits of eager enthusiasm and deep despondency, and far too sensitive for stability in any course he might adopt, the firmness and integrity of his wife were like a wall of safety beside his path ; while her reverence and admiration for his higher intellectual attainments, and, in short, for all that was beautiful or excellent in his character, gave the charm of softness and humility to her intercourse with him.

Never was her skill in building up what was good and noble in his nature more called in question than on occasions like that which has been described as the last visit of Robert Allonby to their cottage. Words rashly spoken, and sometimes without the least foundation in truth, were apt to dwell upon his mind, and goad his spirit to a state of the deepest distress, perpetually driving him back to the humiliating reflection that he had been the means of inducing an amiable woman to descend in the scale of comfort and respectability by becoming his wife.

Groundless and visionary as this complaint

would justly have appeared to any one who looked on Margaret's cheerful, healthy countenance, it was not too absurd to dwell upon a mind like Owen's, and now, when the two Allonbys were gone, he stood leaning against the porch, with his eyes fixed on the distant landscape, and that drooping and dissatisfied expression upon his countenance which Margaret knew but too well how to interpret.

" You are not thinking of poor Robert's foolish words, are you, dear Owen ?" said she.

" I am," replied her husband ; " and I am thinking, too, that rather than your father should have to repent of allowing you to be my wife, I would break my vow again, and live like the rest of the world."

" And if you were like the rest of the world," observed Margaret, " perhaps you might do so with safety. But remember your peculiar circumstances—your family."

" Yes, you do well," interrupted Owen, " to remind me of my family."

" And will you too be captious and unkind ?" said Margaret, while a cloud of gathering tears came over her beautiful eyes ; for she had that day borne enough, and her heart was heavy with the recollection of her brother's words.

It was impossible for Owen deliberately to

give pain to any human being—least of all to his wife ; and his temper, by whatever cause it might be ruffled, was always either soothed by her judicious treatment, or restrained by the dread of awakening uneasiness in her faithful and devoted heart. He became, therefore, as calm and as kind as usual ; but still the harsh and thoughtless expression of Robert Allonby remained like a load upon his soul. Was it right, he asked of himself a thousand times, to degrade the woman he had married—the woman he most admired and honored—was it right to degrade her in the opinion of others, especially of her own family, and all for the sake of maintaining a rule which had only been adopted out of consideration to his own weakness ? Would it not be more generous in him, and more respectful to her, to set aside this rule altogether, whatever the consequences to himself might be ?—and while on the one hand he should thus escape the injurious remarks which singularity always occasions, he should be better able to restore his wife to that position in society which it was evident her father and her brothers considered her to have lost by her alliance with him.

Such were the frequent reflections of Owen Meredith ; and especially one day as he pur-

sued his solitary walk to the residence of the only friend whom, in that neighborhood, he really considered as such. Mr. Mason (for that was the gentleman's name) was a man of exemplary conduct, whose religious principles none could call in question, because they were evinced by the even tenor of a life as peaceful as it was inoffensive and happy. Around the plentiful board of Mr. Mason, a cheerful wife and blooming family were wont to meet; and such were the familiar terms on which Owen joined their social circle, that his peculiar abstemiousness was the theme of much good-humored raillery, and many a playful jest.

All this Owen was accustomed to bear with the most perfect equanimity of mind,—for he loved both the children and their parents; and they were, besides, too well-bred, and too delicate and kind in their own feelings, for it to be possible they should give offence to any one by whom they were known and trusted as they were by Owen.

It happened, however, on this particular day, that Mr. Mason took up the subject more seriously than he had ever done before; and as he and Owen sat together after dinner, he asked him, for the first time, what were his real motives for so strictly adhering to a line of con-

duct which, while it appeared to be productive of no particular good, was the occasion, from its very singularity, of much injurious remark, which, in a minister of religion, ought always, if possible, to be avoided.

Owen felt his color deepen as he prepared himself to reply ; and what could he say ? He had been open and communicative with his friend on every other subject, but how could he speak of the degradation of his own family, now that Margaret was involved in their shame ? He very naturally hesitated in his reply ; but at last concluding that the secret of his father's and his brothers' fate was best buried with them, he endeavored to meet the arguments of his friend by reasons in favor of a general adoption of his own rule.

Here, however, Owen found himself weaker than he had expected ; for Mr. Mason was a good man—a religious man—a man so much better, he believed, than himself, that whatever line of conduct he approved, Owen felt a pre-disposition to regard as right.

“If your object,” said Mr. Mason, as he closely pursued the subject, “be to benefit others by your example, how much better your influence would be, exemplified in a temperate use of the good things of this life, than in totally abstain-

ing from them. By adopting, in moderation, the general customs of society, you show that man, as a rational being, and with a due reverence for the moral law before him, knows how to govern his appetites and restrain his animal propensities ; by abstaining altogether, you act the part of an anchorite, who retires from the world, because he has neither strength of his own, nor sufficient faith to enable him to resist its temptations."

All this was new to Owen. It was possible, he began to think, that certain acts, which regard for his own safety would otherwise have required of him as a private individual, might be injurious to his influence in the church. His pride was roused, too, by the thought that the people over whom his pastoral care extended, should thus have room to suspect him of not being able to govern his own will. He was able to govern it. No man had a right to say of him that he was weaker than the rest of mankind ; and that he dared not partake of the hospitality of a friend, or be hospitable himself, lest he should be guilty of excess. The idea was revolting in the extreme ; and he bent down his head in sullen indignation, while Mr. Mason went on :

" As a minister of religion, too, there is an

all-powerful argument against you in the instance of our Saviour ; and for my own part, I confess I should think myself venturing upon dangerous ground, if I presumed to be more scrupulous than he who left us an example of holiness in life and conduct to which no man has ever yet attained."

Owen was silent. These words sunk deep into his heart. "Is it so?" said he at last—"and have I been all this while in error?"

"In this one instance you are in error," said his friend, "and I grieve over it the more, because your influence is in other respects so useful and beneficial."

Had a man of less scrupulous conduct urged the same arguments upon Owen, it is more than probable they would have produced little impression. But as a creature of feeling, he yielded to their influence ; and simply because he placed implicit trust in the rectitude of his friend's motives, the correctness of his life, and the purity of his principles, he began seriously to question—nay, rather to doubt than to question, whether the sentiments of such a man were not more likely to be right than his own.

It was late before Owen Meredith reached home that night, for he felt a reluctance to meeting and conversing with his wife on a sub-

ject which now absorbed his thoughts. The following day he was to dine at the Grange ; and if he was really in error, it would afford him a good opportunity of commencing a new line of conduct, before a family, who, whatever the difference between their sentiments and his own might be on subjects in general, had, according to their peculiar notions of kindness and respect, always treated him with attention and forbearance.

Owen set off on his walk to the Grange, without having exchanged a single word with his wife on the subject of his conversation the previous day ; and Margaret, happily unconscious of what was revolving in his mind, employed herself in making some domestic arrangements, which could best be completed when she was alone. It was one of those busy days in which women are apt to forget everything but the occupation they have in hand—to forget, at least, until evening comes. But then, when the task is finished, the curtains are let down, the customary meal is prepared, and the solitary wife sits down beside her silent hearth ; then come those busy memories, those fond and tender thoughts, which seem to rush with tenfold force into the centre of the heart, from having been banished even

for so short a season, from their accustomed, their rightful, and their natural home.

It was thus with Margaret. And she kept her baby long awake that night, hoping its father would return to fold it in his arms, and bless the closing of its dewy eyelids. And then she rose, and placed his slippers in their accustomed position, and drew his chair beside her, and listened, and still he did not come. Her child was happier that night—she thought it lovelier than ever. It clasped its rosy hands, and mimicked all the sounds within its little world of nature ; but the hour grew late, and so she sung her wonted lullaby, and then it slept. The hour grew late ; but Margaret had so many blissful thoughts and memories, such sweet and pleasant meditations upon present things, such joyous and exulting hopes of that bright future which her husband and her child seemed all-sufficient of themselves to fill, that even those solitary hours to her were short, though she started up sometimes, and listened and wondered that Owen did not come.

At length she heard his steps upon the garden-walk, his voice of greeting to the faithful dog that always welcomed his return. Margaret had no thoughts but those of joy ; and when her husband stood once more beside her,

the genuine gladness of her soul burst forth in that eloquent and earnest language, with which affection clothes its nameless nothings in a charm too exquisite to be intelligible to a stranger's ear.

"But why were you so late, dear Owen?" said she, rambling on without waiting for a reply. "See, it is ten o'clock; and only think, what a long, long evening I must have had. You do not speak to me," she added, laying her hand upon his arm, and looking in his face.

Alas, that look! It has discovered a sad truth. The light of joy has faded from Margaret's clear, pale brow. Her eyes are shadowed as with a heavy cloud, and dim with tears. Her form is bending like a flower beneath the lightning's flash—a flower that is at once both crushed and withered.

Margaret had no language to express her feelings. Her husband knew her heart—what could she say? Every possible form of argument and entreaty she had already used; what more remained? She would have fallen upon his neck, and wept, had there not been a strange repulsion in his countenance, to her as frightful as it was new. She retired to her chamber; and while hanging over the couch of her sleeping child, for the first time since

her marriage, her tears fell unheeded, and alone.

And we hear of women who can smile at such spectacles as Margaret witnessed that night, and at far wider deviations than that, from the moral purity of an intellectual and immortal being. Yes ; we hear of professedly Christian women who can smile at the trace of the serpent sin over the countenance of him they love best on earth. But let not the heart yield to the belief that such is love. Oh, no ! The only real love is that which is perpetually directed heavenward in its aspirations ; and she who can look with indifference upon her husband's dereliction from this course, though only in a step, a pause, a moment's hesitation, knows nothing of the holy and elevating influence of a fervent and faithful attachment.

It is a deeply painful lesson that we learn from our own unexpected failure under trial and temptation, our own exhibition of the evil which lurks within a deceitful heart, our own unpremeditated deviation from the path of rectitude and peace. Yet in all which relates to our own conduct we are less shocked, and less astonished, because we know the secret faults of which we are guilty ; we know the root of bitterness from which they spring, and though

he world may be surprised, we know that such a line of conduct is not worse than might have been anticipated with such tendencies, and feelings, and principles, as we possess. We know, too, that the sin we have committed is odious to ourselves, as it must be to others ; that we are grieved, and humbled, and filled with remorse at the recollection of it ; and we have a secret satisfaction in resolving, that, by divine assistance, we never will commit the same act again

Such indeed is the nature of the human mind, and such the general character of human experience, that self-knowledge precludes the possibility of confidence in self ; but with those we love, the case is widely different. Pure and disinterested affection is so trusting, so richly gifted with the power to believe in every excellence, so lifted up with hope, that to be shaken from its hold, and stripped of its power, and dashed backward from its high anticipations, is the severest of all the dispensations which our suffering nature has to endure. To see the brow whose beauty was our joy, the smile whose gladness was our welcome, the eye whose light was our life, the countenance whose tone of expression was the music of our souls—to see all these swept over by a

desolating flood, with whose depth and limits we are unacquainted ; there is—there can be no earthly calamity so great.

And yet, upon this it is said that woman can sometimes look calmly ; nay, more—that she can smile when the cloud of shame is on her husband's brow, and when his lip is tainted with the stain the poison-cup has left. The wife, whose history we have thus far traced out, was far from being one of these. She saw her husband's altered look—she knew the nature of the evil which for the first time had stamped its impress there ; but of its fearful power over her future, she was yet ignorant, and dared not allow herself to think. It might be accidental. She tried to think it was. Yet again and again it rose before her, arrayed in fresh horrors every time. Let us look into another page of her history, and see whether her forebodings were not too prophetic in their sadness and their truth.



## CHAPTER V.



THE cottage and the garden of the curate of Heatherstone never used to look more lovely than in fine autumn weather, when the vine-leaves that clustered around the windows had begun to fade into every variety of brown and yellow ; and the oaks, which spread their protecting branches overhead, were tinged with gold, as the light from the glowing west glanced over them before the sun went down. It was now three years since the last scene described took place, and perhaps the trees and shrubs in the curate's garden had lived a little beyond that period of beauty and perfection which is to be observed in the progress of all plantations, when we begin to look through or among the lengthened stems, and want the massive green and gay

luxuriance of flower and leaf, which at one time crowded together, and filled with the aspect of one universal bower the beds and borders of the blooming garden. It might be that this most lovely stage of vegetation had passed by, or that the autumn winds had blown too rudely, or the hoar-frost had come too soon; but somehow or other that garden did not look as it was wont, though it was autumn now, and though the vine-leaves still clustered there, and the oaks still grew and flourished; and all the loveliness of green and gold, with the waving of graceful boughs, and the tracery of leaf and tendril, were still the same. If we may be allowed the simile, it was like the garden of Eden, after our first parents had been expelled. Nature in all her beauty was the same; but the trace of intellectual agency, of man's design, and woman's taste, of the happiest efforts of human art—the painting with material beauty an outward representation of internal bliss—all these were gone; and the low wind that moaned through the adjoining woods, and wasted the yellow leaves from off the topmost boughs, seemed to come with the voice of lamentation for some sorrow or some loss which nature was unable to alleviate or restore.

Owen Meredith was from home that day, and

Margaret sat alone with her children by the cottage-fire. As the evening closed in, they begged for their accustomed play, which never could be so thoroughly enjoyed as when 'heir mother took a more than equal part in the pastime, whatever it might be. Nor was Margaret ever known to refuse, though it was evident she would sometimes have preferred being alone, and still. Yet she had her reward for the effort, however irksome it might be ; and when she saw her children's sparkling eyes, and color heightened by the healthy exercise, and heard their merry laugh, and listened to the glad sound of their little feet upon the floor, it would have been difficult, on looking into her face, to see that she was not happy too. Happy indeed she was, in one sense, for the good are never without their consolations ; and it is their peculiar privilege, that as they never live for self, they can always derive enjoyment from the innocent happiness of others. Two hours later, when the merry voices were all hushed, when the little rosy hands had been clasped in prayer, when the last kiss had been pressed upon the downy cheek, and when sleep had fallen like a soft curtain between them and the moving world, Margaret resumed her seat by the solitary hearth with such an altered look,

that it was evident her sole companions were sad thoughts, with which her countenance and manner betrayed that she was now but too familiar.

Margaret was busy at her work, for whether in joy or in sorrow, she never neglected any present duty ; but sometimes the office of her needle appeared to be suddenly suspended, and one hand dropped involuntarily down upon her knee, while the other was passed hastily across her forehead, as if to sweep away some gathering cloud that hung over a half-formed purpose, or hindered an irresolute design. At last her occupation closed entirely. She looked at the time-piece. It was not yet nine. Her cloak was hastily thrown on ; and in a few minutes more she was tracing, by the light of the moon, the well-known path to her father's dwelling at the Grange.

Opening the private gate which led into the grounds by the yew-tree garden, Margaret loitered among those well-known but deserted walks, which had so many recollections of infancy and maturer years ; she loitered, for her purpose was uncheered by hope ; and now that she had come, she almost wished herself back again at home ; so restless, so irresolute, so aimless is sorrow that cannot be endured—

anxiety that admits of no alleviation but assurance, which, when it comes, is scarcely less intolerable than doubt.

It was a chill and gusty night, and though the moon shone clearly at intervals, it was suddenly obscured by murky clouds that were driven about by a fitful wind, which sometimes swept the leaves in rushing showers from the trees, and stirred the air with murmuring and mysterious voices, such as whisper to the imagination of terror and of death, and sometimes, more fearfully, of sorrow and of sin.

The ungenial influence of the atmosphere, however, was not equally felt by all ; for within the old dining-room of the Grange sat a jovial party, alike unconscious of the fall of faded leaves, the chill of autumn winds, or of the tears which are sometimes called forth by unlawful and unhallowed joy.

In perfect keeping with the disorder and occasional discomfort which prevailed throughout the establishment at the Grange, the old-fashioned dining-room, with its broad window, slightly screened by festoons of ivy, was left in other respects exposed—so that a curious observer, by admission through a private gate into the garden, might have seen the whole family seated around the social board ; for even

when the hall was lighted, precaution was seldom taken to close the shutters until the family retired for the night. The reason for this neglect might partly be, that a general carelessness of appearances prevailed through the whole household, and that the window of the dining-room opened upon a part of the garden entirely unfrequented, and almost closed in by high and thickly-interwoven shrubs. Margaret, however, knew how to thread her way among the matted leaves and boughs ; and when, on turning round a buttress which jutted out from the ancient wall of the mansion, the interior of the lighted room was distinctly before her view, she leaned her brow for a moment upon the cold leaves of the ivy, and breathed a prayer before she even ventured to look in.

Nor was it necessary to look, in order to be assured of the state of things within that room. There were sounds that could not be mistaken, and voices whose every tone went home to that poor listener's heart ; yet all so joyous, and so full of mirth, that the utter impossibility of any thought of sympathy for her, existing among that noisy group, rendered her situation more desolate, and her sorrow more intense.

But why should Margaret be lingering, as if spell-bound to this spot ? Her father, and her

brothers, all except one, had ever been uncongenial, and must long since have become in great measure estranged from her, at least so far as to have separated her from any very intimate participation in what might constitute their familiar enjoyments. Such scenes too—what fascination could they possess for her ? Alas ! how many wives are but too well prepared to understand and answer this inquiry ! There was one voice among that noisy group, whose tones were at once too sweet, too cheerful, and too sad. There was one countenance lighted up by that unholy mirth, whose beauty was still too dear ; and therefore it was that she lingered, and watched, and waited, until the hour when those senseless revels should cease, that she might guard the homeward steps of him who ought to have been the protector of hers.

If Owen Meredith could have contemplated that scene as it really was, surely a character like his would have needed no other check in its career of folly and of shame. The coarse, repulsive countenances of those who composed the group within, every feature distorted with unnatural excitement until the trace of humanity was almost gone, the sound of those voices, the vulgar jests, the buffoonery, the worse than

folly awakening idiot laughter ; and then that pale and solitary woman looking through her tears upon all this—her form the very personification of abject sorrow, alike without pity and without consolation !

But Owen at that moment knew nothing and cared nothing about the effect of his conduct upon others. His was a constitution which knew no bounds in its excitement, when under the influence of unnatural stimulus ; and therefore most especially he was a favorite with the Allonbys, as almost essential to their convivial enjoyments, because the sluggish nature of their grosser faculties rendered them peculiarly dependant upon the amusement which his vivacity and wit supplied. There were other powerful reasons, too, why his society was now as much courted by the family at the Grange, as it had once been despised and shunned. Owen had always exercised a kind of influence over the family there, from a superiority of mind, which, though they desired it not for themselves, they could not but admire in him. The more they admired him, however, and the more they yielded to him that respect which real merit seldom fails to command, the more they felt the tacit reproach of his upright conduct, and pure morals, when contrasted with

their own. What then was their triumph, on finding that he had fallen from that high eminence on which his firm standing had ever seemed like their reproach ! It is true, their respect for him was gone. It is true, even, they regarded him in the light of a fallen and humbled man ; but their triumph was, for this reason, more complete, and their exultation was proportioned to the degree of license which they now derived from his example.

Thus it was that Owen became a favorite with the coarse spirits at the Grange, while he, in his turn, having lost the approval of his own conscience, his own moral dignity, and all that man esteems in himself or others, was more prepared to lay hold of the pitiful consolation of being countenanced and courted by those whom his heart despised. And, coarse, and rude, and illiterate as the Allonbys were, there is something, too—when the best feelings are warped, and the mind gets wrong in its estimate of real good and evil—there is something in wealth, and worldly distinctions, and family mansions, and coats of arms, and plentiful tables, and rich appointments, and horses and carriages : and perhaps, above all, there is something in the torrent of prejudiced opinion, which the worldly-minded can pour into any particular

channel, so as to invest with a certain kind of popularity which appears to be almost irresistible, whatever they may choose to enforce by their influence, or to dignify with their favor. There is—there must be something in all this, or why do we so often see the intelligent and the refined enduring, nay, even seeking society, which, if stripped of worldly and external advantages, would be the very last they would choose ?

It was but natural, therefore, that Owen Meredith should find a degree of satisfaction in the companionship of the Allonbys, which neither their moral nor intellectual qualifications would ever have afforded. Indeed, from causes already stated, he had always felt that they exercised over him more influence than he liked to acknowledge. He had tried a thousand times to persuade himself it was because they were his wife's relations. Had he been asked, he would have unhesitatingly replied that such was the case ; though, from the shrinking he felt under their unsparing raillery in cases where he felt assured of Margaret's approval, it was but too evident that the secret of their influence was altogether distinct from anything connected with her.

And Owen Meredith, the man of refinement,

the elegant scholar, the husband, the father, the minister of a religion whose peculiar characteristic is the power to elevate and purify, while it regenerates the heart—Owen could lend his society to that of rude spirits possessing scarcely a thought or feeling like his own ; he could listen to the vulgar jocularity at the Grange, during hours which might have been spent with a rational, affectionate, and deep-feeling woman, in one of the happiest of homes.

We should at once pronounce of such a gross perversion of taste, that it was beyond nature, did not daily observation of the world convince us that such things have been, and are, and that they will continue to be liable to occur, in cases where, like that of Owen Meredith, the miserable victim has a bodily and constitutional tendency to intemperance. With such, even while the mind revolts against the practice, and the spirit sometimes implores that assistance without which the bondage of sin can never be thrown off—with such, intemperance becomes a passion, a fever, a thirst, which swallows up every other desire, and compels every other consideration to give way. To individuals thus constituted, there is but one path of safety. For the sake of such—and alas ! they are but too numerous—is it not a noble sacrifice for others,

who are less in danger, to be willing to walk in the same path ?

In that good humor and hilarity which even a very slight degree of excess always occasioned, Owen was never so suddenly checked as by the sad voice, the serious countenance, and grave manners of his wife. He seldom lost himself so far as not to be conscious of moral delinquency ; and when he felt, from the meek and silent reproach of Margaret's humbled and sorrowful look, that it was no longer possible to be gay, his unnatural excitement would not unfrequently expend itself in bitter taunts and angry reproaches. Never was his temper more irritated than on occasions when, to use his own expressions, he discovered that he had been watched, suspected, and injuriously thought of ; and when, on the night we have described, he traced with uncertain steps the path across the fields from the Grange to the village of Heatherstone, it may well be supposed he was in no mood to find that Margaret herself, at that late hour, was beside him —though her silence might have pleaded in her favor with one who had been more capable of appreciating her feelings. With Owen, however, in his present state, this very silence was a provocation. He wanted to be talking, and

talking in his own defence, as most persons in his situation do ; nor was it long before he had given vent to that most frequent of all excuses, which throws upon the poor wife the whole blame of the husband's intemperance. Had Margaret been less kind, less cruel, less strict, less lax—had she been anything, in short, but what she was—he scrupled not to declare that he never should have fallen as he had done. And now, as it was all her fault, she must make the best of it, but she never would gain anything by watching and waiting for him there.

All this, however, and more, and worse than it would be easy to repeat, was as nothing to poor Margaret. It could not make the case more humbling or more painful than it was, let her Owen, in his present state, say what he would. She had only come out because she could not rest at home, and because she feared her husband might not be aware of some alterations which had been made in the road, and which might have proved dangerous to one in his situation. Arrived at this part of the way, she therefore passed her arm gently within his, and having led him safely past the spot, she withdrew it again ; for what pleasure could there now be in that heart-warm pressure which had so often been the mute acknowledg-

ment of her husband's happiness, in feeling that she was by his side ?

It was a sad walk to both, and when they saw the lights glancing from their cottage windows, it was a relief to feel that they were reaching home. Margaret, however, was much surprised to see those lights moving rapidly from room to room ; and a very natural apprehension for the safety of her children took possession of her mind, only to be relieved on a nearer approach to the house, by finding that the mark of carriage-wheels beside the door, and the unusual unsettlement of a watchful dog, indicated that some one had arrived—though who it might be, at that untimely hour, was a question which excited both curiosity and wonder.

Margaret's first inquiry was for her children ; but almost before she had been fully assured of their safety, her eye caught the outline of a figure seated by the parlor fire, and the mystery was in part explained. It might well be said to be in part only ; for that figure was so like, and yet so unlike—so shrouded, pale, and ghastly, it seemed to have risen from the dead.

“ My brother !—it is my brother Robert !” exclaimed Margaret ; and in an instant his full dark eyes were fixed upon her face, while a

smile played over his features, which made them look more pale and deathly than before.

" You said I might come to you, Margaret," said he, smiling still—" come to you and die, if I liked ; and here I am, having taken full possession of your house. But where have you been ? for I thought you would never come home—I was so tired of listening for you."

" We have been to the Grange."

" Yes, the servant told me so ; and she made a curious blunder—for she said her master had been dining there, and her mistress had gone to fetch him home. Is this the order of things, Madge ?"

On saying this, Robert laughed as heartily as his strength would permit ; while his sister, with burning cheeks, stooped down to render him some of those kind offices which his feeble state required.

It was not unknown to Margaret that her brother had been for many weeks ill, from a wound received in a duel with a brother officer ; but that he should come to be the inmate of her house, she had not even dared to wish. So much did she feel the altered state of things there, that the presence of any one would have been irksome to her—and that of a brother, under such circumstances, more particularly painful.

Still, as he had come, she must make the best of it ; and, as her heart, despite its heavy griefs, could not but glow with all the true and warm affection that luckless brother had ever claimed, she was not backward in offering him every proof of the most cordial and sisterly welcome.

" But where is Owen ?" asked Robert, who seemed to be in a more than usually talkative mood ; " why does he not come to speak to me ? Perhaps he does not like my being here. Do tell him, Margaret, I am not what I used to be : so tame, so quiet, he will find me as tractable as his own little child. And, oh ! my sister—my own good, kind sister—you may tell him, with truth, I am so happy to be here, that rather than be turned out into the cold world of strangers again, I will submit to any rule he may impose. Ah ! Margaret, don't you remember that miserable morning when I insulted him about the 'rule' of his house, and said so many bitter things to you both ?"

" Yes, I remember that day too well," was answered by Margaret, in a voice so low and sad, that her brother, struck with its peculiar tone, drew her close to his side, and pressed her hand to his lips, and promised, with every demonstration of sorrow for the past, that he would not give trouble nor offence, nor occa-

sion Owen any reason to wish that he had not come

"That was a memorable day," he resumed, recurring to the subject, for he wanted to unburden his heart to his sister, by the history of his whole life from that period; and now, when rest was more than usually desirable, and when excitement was the very thing he had been most warned against, he seemed as if he would have rambled on all night; while the rapid, confused, and incoherent manner in which he talked, proved but too plainly that his hurried and imprudent journey had already been too much for his strength. In vain did Margaret interrupt him by asserting her authority, as a nurse, to insist on his being quiet; he persisted in declaring that he would not retire for the night until he had seen Owen, and received from him a confirmation of his sister's welcome.

Too well did Margaret know the rash and impetuous temper of her brother, to refuse this request; yet, how to screen her husband from his observation, was more than she could hope or think; for, as in all cases of hectic fever, her brother's faculties seemed to be sharpened to an unusual degree of acuteness—so that what might have escaped his notice at another time, was almost sure to be detected now. Another

hour, however—even half that time she thought would be so much gain ; and in the mean while she had made ready for her husband some strong coffee in another room, and implored him not to make his appearance until she had prepared her brother for seeing him. Each time, therefore, that the subject was renewed, she endeavored to turn the thoughts of the invalid into another channel, and even suffered him to enter into a minute detail of his own history—hoping it might occupy his attention, to the exclusion of all other things.

“ You know,” said Robert, in the course of this history, “ that you made me promise I would come to you if ever I fell into distress, and wished to find a home with you. I have been very near the grave since then, and as soon as I was able to think, I determined, that if I lived, I would hasten to you the first moment that I could escape. You have no doubt heard about that foolish duel. I requested a brother officer to write to my father, and give him a fair statement of the whole ; for I knew how it would be misrepresented in the public papers. Indeed, I have been most unfairly treated throughout ; though I confess this amiable temper of mine was at the bottom of the whole affair. But before I enter upon this part

of my story, you must place my chair a little out of the draught. And see what a wretched fire you have, Margaret. It must be a bitterly cold night; I feel as if an ague-fit was upon me."

As Robert Allonby uttered these words, it became evident that a coldness, almost like the chill of death, was creeping over him; his countenance, which before had been extremely pale, assumed a ghastly, and almost livid hue, while strong shiverings shook his whole frame.

"I have certainly caught cold on my journey," said he; "I never felt in this way before. Come near to me, Margaret, and let me feel your hand. And Owen, too—where can he be, and what can he be doing? Surely this is a time to show me the kindness of a brother —nay, more, to give me the benefit of his spiritual advice; for I sorely need his help, and I think this must be death that is creeping over me."

In vain did Margaret endeavor to convince her brother that his present distressing sensations were but the prelude of an interval of fever, occasioned no doubt by his premature exertion, and exposure to fatigue and cold. His own belief was that he was dying; and he very naturally persisted in requesting that Owen might be immediately called.

Margaret left him for a few moments, and returned with her husband. It would have been difficult at that instant to say whether the sister or the brother looked more pale, more haggard, or more distressed ; and there was Owen, heated, flushed, disordered, with a vague consciousness of the reality of what he saw, yet unable to command a single muscle of his face, or tone of his voice, or effort of his mind, to suit so serious and so melancholy an occasion.

Robert Allonby fixed his full, clear, deep eyes, now wild and bright with fever, directly upon the countenance of his brother. "I wanted you to pray with me," said he, "but—but—" and he burst into a phrensiad laugh. "Is it come to this, Madgy, at last?" he continued. "Have they persuaded him to become like one of us?"

Margaret motioned to her husband to leave the room, for she saw that her brother's look and manner were beginning to assume the character of delirium ; and Owen, having just consciousness enough to know that in his present situation he was out of place in such a scene, gladly obeyed the first intimation that he was at liberty to withdraw.

"What is the matter with Owen?" said Robert, as soon as he was gone, in that quick,

hurried, yet earnest manner, which belongs to the impatience of fever. “What is the matter with him? Do tell me, Margaret, for I never saw a man so strangely altered;” and he laughed again in a way that made his sister shudder as she bent over him.

“What is the matter with Owen?” said he again, and again, until Margaret answered, in a low imploring tone, “Don’t ask me dear Robert.”

As she said this, she pressed a kiss upon his forehead, and drawing her fingers through the thick curls of his black and glossy hair, she told him, in a voice as decided as it was kind, that he must submit to let her make preparations for him, as well as all the family, to seek repose for the night.

Yielding to his sister, with that habitual and instinctive acknowledgment of her influence, which had so often tamed his wayward spirit in their early days, Robert at last consented to be conducted to his room, where Margaret watched by him through the night, and had the satisfaction of finding, before morning dawned, that he had sunk into a peaceful sleep.

Three years before this time, Owen Meredith would have shrunk from meeting the eye of his wife on the morning after such a scene

as the last night had presented, but all evil willingly indulged, of whatever nature it may be, has a tendency to harden the heart, even of the most compassionate and sensitive of human beings—so much so, that one is sometimes led to suppose, that if the guilty could be brought for one moment to see and understand the actual cruelty of vice, some who are not yet “all evil,” would surely be induced to forsake their darling sin, from the mere fact, that some principle of kindness is still remaining in their nature.

If intemperance could be indulged by any one without producing such fearful and destructive consequences, it surely might have been by Owen Meredith, whose feelings were more than ordinarily sympathizing and kind; and sometimes, it is true, he had his visitations of such inexpressible tenderness towards his wife and children, that he not unfrequently was brought, by the agony of his soul, to contemplate the idea of putting an end to his own existence, as the only means of rendering theirs less wretched.

And why, it may be asked, did not this compunction work the cure of the malady which preyed upon his peace? If this important question could be answered, it would throw a

new light upon the philosophy of the human mind. Those who know most of the world, and of the state of society as it exists in our own country, have ceased to ask it ; for they look abroad, and behold hundreds and thousands in the same condition, wretched—most irredeemably wretched—nay, actually writhing in the grasp of what they know to be a fatal enemy, and often wrought up to such a state of suffering, as to put an end to life itself, rather than endure another moment of their agony ; yet, powerless, incapable, nay, even unwilling, to cast off the galling fetters of the tyrant who exercises this cruel mastery over them.

It was in one of his most melancholy moods, that Owen Meredith left his house on the morning we have described, and bent his steps toward a lonely walk, the least frequented of any in that neighborhood. Indeed, he had lately learned to seek exclusively such walks, for he never passed a single house in the village, or even in the extensive parish over which his pastoral care extended, without being painfully reminded of duties shamefully neglected, and, as a natural consequence, of his own general unfitness for the sacred office which he filled. With a perversion of feeling by no means uncommon in similar cases, he endeav-

ored to persuade himself that the sanctity of his office had nothing to do with his moral fitness as a minister ; and thus his mind became confused and degraded by lax and uncertain notions of individual responsibility, of the requirements of the religion he professed, and even of the distinction between moral good and evil in general.

Musing upon these things as he pursued his walk, and endeavoring to beguile his conscience, as he had often done before, by an indefinite succession of vague thoughts, Owen Meredith was startled by the sobs of a young woman weeping bitterly, as she sat upon a bank by the roadside. In one hand she grasped the skirts of a rosy child that was gathering the yellow leaves from the ground, while with the other she pressed her apron to her forehead, so as to conceal from her sight any one who might happen to approach. It was evident her grief had nothing to do with her child, for it was the picture of health and glee, laughing and crowing at the sight of the eddying leaves, which a light wind was blowing from the trees ; while the mother sat rocking to and fro with that involuntary and monotonous motion, which sometimes affords the last and

sole remaining relief under acute and hopeless suffering.

"My good woman," said Owen—and the poor creature started as he spoke—"can I do anything to assist you?"

"Oh, no," was the melancholy reply, as she wiped her eyes, and looked another way, as if feeling but too deeply that he was not the person from whom consolation or help could come.

"But surely there is something I can do," said Owen, still lingering. "You seem to be in trouble."

"Seem!" said the woman, somewhat scornfully, and her eyes flashed upon him with a meaning he could not understand.

"I cannot leave you in this state," said Owen, making another effort, though the expression of the woman's countenance was most painful to him.

"Did you never leave any one in trouble?" she asked, with a bitterness which made him apprehend that her reason had departed.

"Did you never leave them in trouble?" she continued, with her teeth almost clinched, "and did you never find them in trouble when you came home? Oh, sir, forgive me; it is the first time I have offended in this way; and sorry indeed I am to have insulted my minister

as I have done ; but if you will believe me, I have gone through that, this night, which would have maddened a stronger brain than mine !”

“ Who are you ?” asked Owen.

“ You don’t know me, then, sir ? Why, I’m the wife of your own gardener, James Grant, the man you turned away for drinking.”

“ And he has been out of work these hard times ?”

“ Why, no, sir, I can’t say that he has been exactly out of work ; but it’s the drink, sir, that’s destroying him, and us all.”

Owen felt his color deepen as he spoke, but his natural pride reminded him that he ought to assume a dignity which he could not feel.

“ Have you ever talked to your husband on this subject ?” he asked.

“ Talked to him ?” said the woman, rising from her posture of abject wo ; “ I have prayed him on my bended knees to spare himself and me ; but when did you know talking of any use in such a case as his ?”

“ Yet, surely, the kind importunity of a faithful wife—”

“ Sir—sir”—continued the woman, fixing her eyes with something more than earnestness upon Owen’s face, “ I would fain hope to be kept from saying what is unbecoming from me

to one in your station ; but I am a poor crazed creature, and you must forgive me if I do. It is fit, too, that you should learn my history, for you, of all men, ought to be made acquainted with it."

Owen felt it right to encourage the poor woman to go on, hoping he might be able, in his pastoral office, to render her some assistance ; though, had his own feelings been consulted, he would more willingly have closed an interview which had already cost him sufficient pain.

The simple history of James Grant was soon told. He had been a young man of uncertain habits before entering the service of the curate of Heatherstone ; when the example of his master, the oversight of his mistress, and the domestic regulations of their house and family, had wrought so great a change in his character, that his wife, for some time, esteemed herself the happiest of women. Still James was never to be depended upon, for he hung his good resolutions upon the principles of other men, rather than upon his own—resting his confidence upon what the curate did, instead of upon what he resolved to do himself. Nor did his wife fear anything, even on this ground ; for she thought if her husband remained steady

so long as his master's example was the same, there could be no reason for apprehending any change. One evening, however, about a year before this time, James Grant returned home, and seating himself by the fireside opposite his wife, he looked in her face with a strange kind of meaning in his eye. It was half comic, half wild, and his wife thought he had some strange story to tell her, which would afford them both amusement for the evening. What was her astonishment, then, to find that his own natural tendency to evil had received a powerful stimulus from circumstances which had transpired in his master's family, and of which her husband's personal observation permitted her not to doubt. The conduct of James Grant assumed a different aspect from that time. A willing slave to inclination, he soon became the victim of intemperance ; and though dismissed on this ground from the employment of a kind and generous master, he still maintained that it was the example of that master which had been the cause of his ruin.

"And it was so," said the poor wife, at the conclusion of her story, "though I say it who perhaps ought not ; for so long as I could uphold the clergyman as being clear of every-

thing of the kind, my husband never had a word to say."

Owen was silent: what could he reply? Taking the first opportunity of a moment's pause to turn away, the woman laid her hand upon his arm, and, with a fresh burst of agony, implored him not to leave her until he had told her what to do.

" You can go back to your happy home," said she, " where I know there is one who always meets you with love and kindness."

" And you?" asked Owen, for despite his self-reproaches, he could not withhold his pity.

" My home!" said the woman; " oh! sir, it is so desolate. Last night my husband stayed out later than usual, so I took my child in my arms, and crept round by the orchard hedge, and down the back lane of the public-house, where I knew he always was. The shutters were closed, but through a chink in the wood I could see into the room where he sat with two or three neighbors; and a merry company they were, if one might judge by their songs, and their laughter, that went to my very heart, while I stood shivering there in the cold. I said there were two or three neighbors, and there was that flaunting girl, the publican's daughter, going in and out, and jeering with

James about the curtain-lecture he would get at home. Oh ! sir, I could not bear it. I think my poor head was turned ; so, instead of going back to our house, I wandered over the common, and sat down by the hedge, and cried while my baby slept, and here we have been all night. Now, tell me, sir, if you have any Christian kindness in your heart—tell me what I must do, for there is no supporting this misery."

Owen stood all this while with his eyes fixed upon the ground, and his foot unconsciously trampling down some flowers which grew upon the bank. The words of this wretched being sank deep into his heart, and the fact which she told him of the ruinous nature of his own example, sank deeper still.

"What shall we both do ?" said he at last ; "for my grief is deeper than yours ;" and tears, the natural result of his moral malady operating in connexion with his sensitive mind, chased each other rapidly down his cheeks. "Go home, my good woman !" he continued, offering money to the poor wretch whose necessities were beyond his power to relieve. "Go home, and do your best, and pray fervently for your husband, and for me, and to-morrow I will call upon you."

The woman looked astonished, for the resentful language her husband had been accustomed to use in speaking of his late master after being dismissed from his service, and the unsparing manner in which he had exposed and triumphed over those instances of intemperance on the part of the clergyman, which so many voices were ready to tell, had led her to suppose him some hard-hearted Pharisee, who would justify in himself the indulgence he denied to another. Natural feeling, however, always bears with it strong evidence in the cause of truth, and there was something in the expression of Owen's countenance, in his tears, and in the tone of his voice, which at once softened her indignation against him as the cause of her husband's ruin, and excited a feeling of compassion for one whom, an hour before, she would have deemed the last man on earth to call it forth.

With an expression of gratitude, accompanied by something like respect, Owen's offered bounty was accepted, and he immediately directed his steps to the house of his friend Mr. Mason, where he had become of late a much less frequent visiter than in former years. The fact was, the feelings of this friend, as well as those of all his family, had cooled toward a

man whom they no longer looked upon as perfectly correct ; and, forgetting that they had been accustomed to ridicule his strict abstemiousness, and that Mr. Mason had used his influence as a Christian friend to induce him to lay aside this rule, and to live as himself and the rest of the religious world were living, they were perhaps the least charitable of all his parishioners toward a temptation by which they themselves had never been assailed.

Of all kinds of estrangement, that of children is perhaps the most touching to our natural feelings. Yet even this Owen Meredith had to bear, when he entered the house of Mr. Mason ; for the junior part of the family, though possibly unconscious of the cause, were accustomed to hear him spoken of in a manner which at once destroyed their confidence, and repelled their love.

“ They used to meet me at the turn of the garden-walk,” said Owen to himself, as he traced the well-known path. “ They used to stop me with their little arms twined around me ; and now, no wonder they fly from me—no wonder they are taught to shun such a monster as I am grown.” And with these sad thoughts, he asked if Mr. Mason was at home, and if he could see him for a few moments.

He was told that the master of the house was at home, and he was told so by a servant ; for he had lately been ushered into a vacant parlor whenever he called, and sometimes permitted to remain some time alone before any one appeared. At last Mr. Mason entered the room, and shook him slightly by the hand, while his eye was fixed upon some distant object, and his voice uttered only the common-place expressions of a casual acquaintance.

And Owen was in a state of mind to understand and feel all this ; but he nerved himself nevertheless for the occasion, and answered in a manner suited to the reception his friend thought fit to give him.

"Perhaps you are engaged this morning?" said Owen, in a tone of inquiry.

"I am a little occupied," replied Mr. Mason, looking at his watch ; "but the hour is early, and I dare say I shall have time to finish my letters for the post."

"I would not detain you," resumed Owen, "but that there is a subject of some importance to me, on which I wish to exchange a few words with you ; and as you are yourself deeply implicated, it is but right that you should bear with me, if I speak of truths which you may not like to hear."

"I implicated?" said Mr. Mason, with a look of grave astonishment; "I myself implicated?"

"Yes, you," replied Owen. "Perhaps you may remember, about three years ago, advising me to lay aside the rule of conduct I at that time maintained with regard to total abstinence from all those indulgences which so frequently lead to intemperance and excess."

"I do," replied Mr. Mason; "but I am not prepared to be charged with the consequences which have resulted, and which no one can deplore more than myself."

"The consequences," resumed Owen, "were such as any one acquainted with human nature, but more especially with my own constitution, might have been prepared to expect."

"With human nature in general," observed Mr. Mason, "I may certainly boast some acquaintance; but of your particular constitution, as you are pleased to call it, I am happily ignorant."

"It is time you should be informed, then," said Owen, "that there is a particular constitution of body, whether hereditary or otherwise is of little importance to the point in question, to which artificial stimulus becomes, by frequent indulgence, a thirst—a craving—an absolute want, too powerful for the mere act of

the will, unaided by circumstances, to keep in check. You, who sit calmly there, despising my weakness, and abhorring my guilt, can form no idea of the fire that is awakened in a brain like mine, or of the restlessness of mind and body, the withering of the nerves, the sinking of the heart, and the frightful vitality of the diseased imagination,—producing altogether such an accumulation of agony as a fresh application of the poisonous stimulus alone can relieve, by affording a temporary unconsciousness of reality and truth."

" Happily for me," replied Mr. Mason, " I am unconscious of these things ; nor do I wish to cultivate a farther acquaintance with such a state of mind and feeling."

" But you shall hear me," exclaimed Owen, grasping his arm. " You shall know into what a gulf you have plunged the man who was weak enough, and guilty enough, to make your advice a plea for the indulgence of his own inclinations. I am determined you shall know this, because you are a religious man ; and you ought to be made acquainted with the working-out of every system of moral conduct which you advocate. Know, then, that I stand here before you a ruined man—ruined in body and soul, except only—and I say it with profound

reverence—that there is more mercy with God than with man ; and I believe that, even now, if I had strength to shake this monster from me, I believe—I hope that I might yet be forgiven. But you cannot know—no, there is no language adequate to convey to your understanding, the depth to which I have fallen, and the agony in which I live !”

As Owen said these words, he leaned forward, and covering his face with both his hands, actually groaned aloud. His friend, painfully affected by this evidence of his sufferings, yet still anxious to clear himself from blame, again took up the argument he had so often used, that, in recommending a deviation from the strict rule of abstinence, he had not the most distant idea of countenancing excess.

“ But how dared you,” exclaimed Owen, “ advise me to break down the old landmark, without furnishing me with some other protection against the desolating flood ?”

“ You had your principles—your conscience.”

“ Yes, I have my principles and my conscience still ; and what of them ? They are convicting me all the day, and condemning me all the night.”

“ You had the resource of prayer.”

“ I had—I acknowledge it with self-abase-

ment, and with shame ; but how often was the tempting cup first drained, and then a weak, irresolute, and faithless prayer poured out from polluted lips. I tell you again, that the spark once lighted in a constitution like mine, a train of evil is set on fire, which no human power is able so much as to restrain. Would you like to see what that deadly fire has burned up ?— come home with me, and count the ashes on my hearth."

" Still you must allow," said Mr. Mason, " that what I did was done in ignorance of the peculiarity of your temperament, and of your liability to fall."

" I do allow it," said Owen : " I know it was done in ignorance, and I dwell thus upon the subject, that you may understand it better, and be more cautious for the future when you have to deal with others who are constituted like me ; for I am not alone in my degradation. Hundreds and thousands are, like me, the children of intemperate parents ; with them it is possible the inclination to excess may prevail in a greater degree, and if you have unconsciously been the ruin of one man, how are you sure that you have not injured others ? How are you sure that, amongst those who sit down to your plentiful board, there are not

other men, weak, and hesitating on the brink of ruin, as I was once. Oh! sir, it is a solemn and a fearful thing for a religious professor to advise any one to give up a scruple, whatever it may be!

"I am now going home, if home it may be called, where I find neither peace nor comfort, and where the smiles of my angel wife are yet more wounding than her tears. I am going to hear the prattle of my children, and to feel like a demon blasting their cherub joy. I am going to tread the walks of my garden, whose beauty is gone; to wander in the woods, whose vocal melody has no music for me; to hide myself from the sun, and the pure clear sky; to skulk away from the social intercourse of man—it may be to put an end to this torment at once!"

As Owen said this, he turned away. The last words had been muttered between his clinched teeth, and his look was uncertain and wild; but Mr. Mason, concluding he was even at that moment under temporary excitement, set no guard upon his steps, further than to follow him with his eye to the most distant part of his own grounds.

Owen wandered on to a remote part of an adjoining wood, not unfamiliar to him—for he had lately sought the most solitary walks which

the neighborhood afforded—and choosing for the scene of his meditations a deep and shadowy dell, he sunk down upon a bank, and resigned himself to a train of thoughts, of which none would have envied him the possession. Although he had almost become a stranger to the sweet influences of nature, he was soothed, even in his present state of mind, by the sound of rippling water near him; and sometimes he looked, almost unconsciously, to a natural fountain in the rock, from whence a little stream of clear water was falling into its green basin below. While he gazed upon this spot, two peasants approached him—an old man, and a boy. They were evidently weary with labor, and the elder of the two took off his cap, and shook back the long gray hairs from his brow, while the boy made a cup with both his rosy hands, and drank heartily from the sparkling stream. The old man then did the same, and both seemed refreshed, as they turned away to resume their toil, talking cheerfully as they went.

“It is enough for them,” said Owen, breathing his thoughts aloud, “and they have to bear the burden and the heat of the day.”

The beams of the afternoon sun had begun to shoot askance through the tall stems of the trees, and to glance upon the mossy bank where

Owen was laid, before he thought of returning home ; but when the plaintive robin warbled its last song, and the smoke of the woodcutter's fire began to die away in the distance, he rose to depart from that solitary spot. He rose, and how ? An humbled, an altered—a better, and a wiser man ; for he had knelt in that solitude, and he had prayed. What more—what else could he do ? And boundless, beyond all power of language to describe, is the mercy of that dispensation, by which man is permitted, even in such a state as his, to have recourse to prayer.

Margaret knew by her husband's countenance, when he entered the house that day, that some change had been wrought upon his heart and feelings ; and she yearned to clasp her arms around him, in mute acknowledgment of that change, but feared to dispel the blessed vision. She retired, therefore, to her own chamber, to seek that communion with which the cup of true happiness ever overflows ; and instead of trespassing upon her husband's feelings, by watching him too narrowly, or even seeking his confidence too much, she busied herself in the sick-room of her brother, commanding both the beloved ones to the care of Him, who needed not that any human eye

should observe the secret working of their hearts.

It had ever been the great charm of Margaret's character, that she neglected no immediate duty for the indulgence of her own feelings, whether of a painful or a pleasurable kind; and never more than on the present occasion had she found the benefit of having cultivated such habits of self-renunciation as to enable her to carry on her practical duties, when her heart would otherwise have been absorbed by sensations of its own. Indeed, her poor brother now began to require all her attention. His imprudent efforts to exert himself so far as to undertake a journey which would bring him under the watchful care of a sister, had produced the natural consequence of an alarming relapse—under which, so violent were the symptoms of fever and delirium, as to render him altogether unconscious of where he was, or of what was taking place around him.

During this distressing state of their domestic affairs, Margaret had the inexpressible satisfaction of seeing her husband take part with her in all the sad duties of watching her brother. It is true she thought it was the illness of that brother, which operated as a check upon his accustomed habits; but she was thankful

for the change so far as it went, and sometimes she ventured to think it went even to his heart —for there was a calm spread over his countenance, and a clear, steady, earnest expression in his eye, such as she had not observed there for years ; and the observation of a “ faithful loving woman ” is not often at fault.

Before a week had passed over, it was evident to Margaret that the exhausted frame of her brother was rapidly sinking. He awoke from sleep in the full possession of his mental faculties, but with a ghastliness of look and features which left nothing to be hoped. He himself was perfectly aware of his situation ; and motioning for every one to leave him but Owen and Margaret, he took a hand of each, and began to tell them what he felt, what he knew, and what he feared.

“ Margaret,” said he,—“ my own beloved Margaret, you know all this ; and with you I can have nothing more to do, but to kiss you for the last time, and to say farewell. Go, then, and leave me.”

“ I cannot leave you, dearest,” said Margaret ; “ I cannot leave you now.”

“ Yes, you must leave me, for time presses, and I feel that life is ebbing fast. I have nothing further to do with you but to love and thank

you, and that would last for ever. But with Owen it is different. He must remain with me ; we two must be alone."

Margaret did as she was desired, and they two remained alone in that awful chamber—the chamber of death. An hour passed over, and Margaret heard no summons, though her step was ever at the door. At last she ventured to look in. All was so still, she could not but apprehend that in some terrible conflict of soul, her husband had fallen a sacrifice to his over wrought feelings. The next instant his figure caught her eye. He was kneeling by the bed, and apparently unconscious of anything beyond the communion of his own heart with its Maker. Her hand resting upon his shoulder startled him. They both looked up. The countenance of death was before them. The spirit had fled.

On the evening of the following Sunday, a larger congregation than usual met in the parish church of Heatherstone ; many who entered the little enclosure in which the dead of the neighborhood were laid, looked aside toward a newly-covered grave ; and some turned off from the path, and walked around it, and sighed, and spoke kindly of the passing away from the world of one so young as Robert Allonby.

But when the carriages from the Grange drove up, they all went on, or stood back to leave a clear course for the mourning family, dressed in their sad habiliments of recent wo. It was a solemn sight to look into the accustomed place of the Allonbys that night, and to see so many, whose enjoyments were centred in this world, suddenly and forcibly reminded that of all they most loved and prized, they could take nothing with them to another ; and whether it was their natural grief that touched them so deeply, or that their hearts were struck with the reality of eternal things, they wore an aspect on that occasion which was observed by all to indicate more than they had ever been known to exhibit of serious and true feeling. The minister, too, when he rose from his seat, was like one who had been conversing with the things of eternity, and had come to show them to others. His voice at first was tremulous and low, but soon all eyes were fixed upon him, for his very soul was that night ready to be poured forth for his people. Such is the power of truth—and it was the truth he had pledged himself to divulge—that he spoke with an eloquence which soon riveted the attention of his whole congregation, as of one man ; and old men, and young women, the worldly, the

rustic, and the gay, were all, as with one mind, absorbed in his feeling and his words.

It was, however, a discourse of rather an extraordinary nature to which Owen Meredith gave utterance that night ; and Margaret had more than once almost started from her seat, for nothing her husband had previously said had prepared her to expect it. It had been announced as a funeral sermon for her brother and she had anticipated much that would be interesting to all, and affecting to some ; but when she heard her husband enter upon his own personal history in connexion with the deep penitence of that closing scene which he alone had witnessed, she could not but look up to assure herself that her husband was perfectly master of himself, and in his right mind—so entirely opposed was such an exposure to the natural shrinking of his sensitive feelings. One look was sufficient, and she bowed her head in silent and prayerful acknowledgment that it was even so ; for never had Owen worn a character so profoundly earnest as on this occasion. Humility and deep reverence were blended together in his every look and tone ; and in this manner he went on, sparing nothing, but making full confession before his people of what

had been his temptation, his besetment, and his fall.

There is no true humility before God, without something of the same nature being exemplified also before man ; and Owen bowed himself to the judgment of his people, acknowledging himself unfit to be their pastor, yet offering before them his solemn pledge, that, as strength might be granted him to resist temptation, he would renounce, then and for ever, all those indulgences which had so fearfully perilled his safety, both for this world and the next.

As Owen uttered that confession, there was scarcely an eye undimmed by tears among the many which looked up from the silent congregation ; and when the service was ended, and the different groups of people left their places in the church, the greater portion of them loitered behind, to catch the eye of their pastor as he walked down the aisle, to clasp his ever ready hand, and to say a few kind words to him of sympathy for the past, and of esteem and confidence for the future.

Owen felt all this, as it thrilled like a fresh spring of vitality through his heart, but there was one who felt it even more ; and when Margaret leaned upon his arm as they passed along the churchyard-walk that night the hope

and the gratitude which claimed alternate sovereignty in her soul, were a blessed omen of the happy future then dawning upon the cottage of the Curate of Heatherstone.

THE END.



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